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# From Transmission to Participation: A Case Study of Democratic Debate at the BBC African Services



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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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# Abstract

This thesis is about the blurring boundaries between audiences and producers as a result of new social media technology and new approaches to journalism in international broadcasting to Africa, commonly referred to as participatory journalism. Audience participation, it has been suggested, can foster stronger democracy through engaging citizens in democratic debate or in the BBC World Service words, 'a global conversation'. Informed by deliberative democracy and dialogue theory, I use dialogic deliberation as a critical evaluative framework to understand the relationship between participatory journalism and democratic debate. This research goes beyond existing studies about participatory journalism by focusing on the relationship between a British broadcaster and social media audiences in Africa, thus contributing to a new understanding of media power and transnational deliberation between the Global North and the Global South.

The work draws on ethnographic data collected through participant observation at the BBC African services in London and on social media through three mediated moments a) a crowd sourced Nigerian Election map b) the launch of a new audience led programme and c) Facebook discussions about football. Through unique access to both the newsroom, the BBC's own web analytics systems, and by using both qualitative and quantitative methods, I demonstrate how it is changing journalistic and audience practices, and not social media technology by itself that is contributing to advancing international democratic debate. I also found that in order to allow for a more inclusive and accessible democratic debate, journalists need to give up their gatekeeping culture and use a more dialogic approach to participation including; inclusion and equality that allow personal storytelling, reciprocity and respect in debates, self-reflection of their own values and mutual exploration of news topics together with participating audiences.



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More than anyone else, Ben Hagan, my dyslexia tutor is the person whose contribution made this dissertation achievable. He not only gave me the tools and confidence to be able to write, he also helped me understand that people with dyslexia can and deserve to be considered for the degree of Dr of Philosophy.

Thank you to all participants at the BBC World Service for sharing your precious time and thoughts with me so generously, I have tried to do it all justice.

All the hard work and my achievements were for my parents, Michael and most of all for my daughter Elsie...



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# Chapter 1 — Introduction

## **1.1 Social media and democracy**

This thesis is about social media enabled participatory journalism and its role in international democratic debate, particularly in an African context. The potential role of social media in democracy building is explained first.

Since the dawn of the internet, cyber utopians have predicted that new digital tools will democratise society (Blumler and Gurevitch 2001). In addition, public sphere theorists have argued that electronic empowerment will enable a freer and more open public sphere by breaking the monopoly of media organisations and giving citizens a voice (see, Quan-Haase, Wellman et al. 2002, Dahlgren 2005, Jenkins 2006, Castells 2007). Evaluating this, Wilhelm (2000) argues that the quality of online deliberation can be measured by the increase in the number of sources and the pluralism of those sources. In early digital development theory, technocentric views assumed that digital connections, including social media, would allow people in developing nations to make the leap into a world of economic opportunities (Alzouma 2005). However, these initial digital utopian ideas were quite quickly replaced by digital divide theory (Norris 2001) and a lack of digital media literacy arguments (Hargittai 2001), followed by more measured predictions of internet democracy and development (Heeks 2010, Loader and Mercea 2012).

With the growth of social media and Web 2.0 there was a second wave of digital democracy theory, which saw social media as emancipating people and stimulating more democratic forms of deliberation and participation in politics (Papacharissi 2010, Wasserman 2011, Gil de Zúñiga, Jung et al. 2012). Many emancipatory qualities of democratisation have been attributed to the social media platforms Facebook and

Twitter, including starting revolutions in the Middle East and changing the power dynamics between politicians and citizens and between journalists and audiences (Howard, Duffy et al. 2011, Loader and Mercea 2012, Marichal 2016). This is especially the case in Africa, where research has shown the role of social media in enabling citizen reporters to create alternative and more pluralist spaces for public debate, in times of political crisis, such as in Kenya in 2007 and in Zimbabwe in 2008 (Mäkinen and Wangu 2008, Moyo 2009, Riaz and Pasha 2011). Although social media penetration is still low in many of the poorest countries on the African continent, there are now nearly 140 million Facebook users in total, with 16 million in Nigeria and 3.5 million in Ghana.<sup>1</sup> The phenomenal growth of social media in Africa means that a study of their associated practices is relevant, despite, or perhaps because of the fact that there are still over one billion people in Africa who lack access to social media.<sup>2</sup>

I argue that the role of social media in democracy is not just about citizens having access to technology, but is also about how social media are used, in other words: social practices. The definition of social media I adopt, provided by Howard and Parks (2012), helps to understand the multiple layers of social media practices. This definition sees social media as consisting of three parts:

- (a) the information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content;
- (b) the content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, ideas, and cultural products; and
- (c) the people, organizations, and industries that produce and consume digital content (Howard and Parks 2012: 362).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm> July 2016, accessed 13th November 2016.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm> accessed 13th November 2016.

My research focuses mainly on b) (the content) and c) (the people), without ignoring technology and the opportunities provided by its functionality or its limitations. I also argue that these three parts are not distinct fields, but need to be assessed critically in tandem in order to understand the democratic potential of social media.

The initial optimism about social media and democracy around the world has recently been dampened by increasing evidence of undemocratic uses of participatory media in the form of hate speech, trolling, abusive attacks on journalists, fake news and links between online hate and offline abuse (Mäkinen and Kuira 2008). Recent discussions about the vote for Brexit in the UK's June 2016 referendum and the election of Donald Trump as US president in November 2016 have been characterised by warnings of the effect on politics of echo chambers created by algorithms which cause people to gravitate towards speaking only to like-minded people (Howard 2016). The lack of democratic debate on social media in relation to these events, including opinion bubbles, fake news and hate speech, indicate a potential negative role for these platforms in public dialogue (Flaxman, Goel et al. 2016, Marichal 2016). These issues open up questions about ethics, monitoring and responsibility in using social media as a means of public engagement (Mpofu 2013).

Social media organisations like Facebook and Twitter, for example, importantly lack editorial frameworks and editorial guidelines, at least so far, but nevertheless reach and connect people all over the world, competing with journalism in terms of how people access information and consume news.<sup>3</sup> Studying the implications of social media for democratic debate is of particular relevance outside the Global North, where few studies of social media journalism practice have been conducted (Mpofu 2013). I argue in this thesis that despite the criticisms, social media have the potential to play a role in international public life and global debate, a role which depends on how these tools are

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<sup>3</sup> Article about social media echo chambers <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/nov/10/facebook-fake-news-election-conspiracy-theories>> accessed 10th November 2016.

used. If social media allows the kind of participation that can lead to a pluralist public sphere where power can be distributed more evenly, then there is an opportunity for democratic debate. This is particularly the case in the context of communication between the Global North and the Global South, where there is much to gain from an increased two way flow that would mean a break from previous decades of broadcast domination by the Global North.

## **1.2 International broadcasting - diplomacy and debate**

Before the internet, particularly during the Cold War and its aftermath, international broadcasters from the Global North like *Deutsche Welle*, *Voice of America*, *BBC World Service* and *Radio France Internationale* dominated transnational information flows to the rest of the world via radio and TV broadcasting. International broadcasting helped maintain the hegemony of the Western democracies in the power struggle against the Eastern bloc. However, hegemony, which will be defined in section 2.2 in this thesis, is not stable over time and with the changing geopolitical landscape, this international media environment has changed significantly, with less dominance of global politics from the UK and the US as well as increased competition from local media providers (Fenton 2009, Gillespie and McAvoy 2016).

Despite these developments, the BBC World Service, based in Britain (BBC WS here after), enjoys a weekly audience reach of 283 million people around the world. Outside the UK, the continent where the BBC WS retains the greatest influence in terms of audience numbers today is Sub Saharan Africa.<sup>4</sup> However, audience figures in Africa are falling, especially listenership via shortwave radio.<sup>5</sup> In 2010, shortwave radio listening to the BBC WS declined by 2.9 million in Nigeria alone according to the

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<sup>4</sup> BBC Global Audience Figure

<[http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2010/05\\_may/24/wsnews.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2010/05_may/24/wsnews.shtml)> accessed 3rd August 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Most audiences in Africa listen to the BBC on shortwave radio in English, Hausa, Somali or Swahili, according to the BBC's own audience measurements.

BBC's own figures and that regression has continued ever since.<sup>6</sup> The BBC WS is trying to meet this decline by increasing its reach via TV, the internet, mobile phones and increasingly social media like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter. The BBC African services use of social media to achieve audience participation in the context of social, cultural and technological shifts is the empirical focus of this research.

In this thesis I argue that in order to deal with an increasingly competitive media landscape from the mid 2000's onwards, international broadcasting, including the BBC WS, took a dialogic turn by moving from a transmission model to a dialogic model (these terms will be explained in Chapter 4) (Zöllner 2006). For example, in 2005 the BBC WS introduced their key aim of fostering 'a global conversation', as described below.

To connect and engage audiences by facilitating an informed and intelligent dialogue – a global conversation – which transcends international borders and cultural divides, giving audiences opportunities to create, publish and share their views and stories (BBCWS 2010:no page).

The global conversation concept was used to move away from what has been referred to as 'fortress journalism', where journalists lock themselves away and do not talk to audiences, therefore becoming irrelevant (Horrocks 2009). Peter Horrocks, director of the BBC WS until January 2014, famously stated 'tweet or be sacked' (Horrocks 2009, Barnard 2016: 190), an attempt to emphasise the urgency of using new technology to engage with audiences around the world.

It was the BBC WS's concept of a global conversation that captured my imagination and inspired me to try to understand international democratic dialogue in practice. Is a

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<sup>6</sup> BBC Global Audience Figure  
<[http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2010/05\\_may/24/wsnews.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2010/05_may/24/wsnews.shtml)> accessed 3rd August 2016.

global conversation started by a British broadcaster able to deliver inclusion and equality for diverse audiences all over the world, as its definition indicates, or was the attempt to use social media journalism just a way to increase engagement and boost audience figures? Some would even ask whether the BBC WS is relevant to local audiences in Africa or if it is just a colonial relic, expressed in this quote below from Andrew Walker's historical account of the BBC WS *A Sky Full of Freedom*.

The World Service has been described (by an American journalist) as for the free mind what Oxfam is for the hungry and by others in rather less complimentary terms – 'the mouthpiece of imperialism', for example. It is in fact peculiarly British in the haphazard way in which it developed, and its character derives ultimately from decisions made as long ago as the 1920s when 'wireless' was in its infancy (Walker 1992: 13).

Public engagement, like international broadcasting is usually not without self-interest. The BBC WS and its global conversation form an important part of Britain's public diplomacy strategy, which aims to use the good reputation of the BBC's international news service to bring 'benefit to the UK, the BBC and to audiences around the world' (BBCWS 2010:no page).

Public diplomacy is about exerting power over others, not hard power imposed by armies or economics, but soft power derived from symbolic and cultural influence (Nye 2008). On the basis of the BBC WS's public diplomacy strategy, it can of course be argued that the global conversation is just about spreading a pre-set communication strategy that serves British interests abroad. However, the intent is for the BBC WS to provide a trusted and impartial news service, thereby boosting Britain's reputation (Cull 2008). Chapter 4 will outline the relationship between the British government and the BBC WS and the implications this has for international democratic debate.



In the past, the relevance of the BBC WS in a global context has been questioned by its immediate stakeholders. For example, during my study the BBC WS was experiencing funding cuts as a result of the UK government's major spending review in 2010. These cuts lasted until the recent boosts to its funding in November 2015<sup>7</sup> and November 2016.<sup>8</sup> While the British government was reducing its support for international broadcasting, other states were increasing their spending on soft power and cultural influence, as for example with Al Jazeera from Qatar, CCTV from China and Russia Today.<sup>9</sup>

As a result of the changing political landscape in 2015 and 2016, the British government's has changed its attitude its recent strategic defence review resulted in the biggest funding boost for the BBC WS since the 1940s.<sup>10</sup> If the global conversation in the mid-2000s was fuelled by an optimistic view of social media and democracy, the BBC WS's new remit in 2016 is inspired by a growing perception of undemocratic propaganda on the internet. Besides potential propaganda from Russia and China, the threat from classified terrorist organisations including IS, Al Qaeda and Boko Haram is a priority. The British Government's new priority for the BBC WS (2015 onwards) is to serve as a tool to fight 'the information war' in countries deemed to be 'in democratic deficit'.<sup>11</sup> In a 2015 report about the UK's new national security strategy, the government phrased the motivation for increased funding for the BBC WS in the following way:

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7 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/aboutthebbc/entries/a082f79d-30cf-4c78-a886-0e65f460b9f5>> accessed 13th March 2016.

8 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-37990220> accessed 2nd January 2017.

9 Guardian article about the BBC World Service fighting an information war  
<<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/dec/21/bbc-world-service-information-war-russia-today>> accessed 13th November 2016.

10 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-37990220>> accessed 2nd January 2017.

11 <<http://www.politico.eu/article/bbc-world-service-set-for-fightback-in-information-war/>> accessed 5th December 2015.

A stronger World Service will help to enhance our position as the world's leading soft power promoting our values and interests globally (Cameron 2015).<sup>12</sup>

Whilst the BBC WS now seems to be moving away from its dialogic objective of fostering a global conversation, this was very much the focus of the organisation during my fieldwork in 2011-2013. Despite this latest shift by the BBC WS, and in light of recent debate about the role of social media in promoting undemocratic debate, instead focusing on building democratic debate online seem to be even more relevant today.

The BBC WS is not the only international broadcaster to have struggled to prove its relevance in a competitive media landscape and a changing geopolitical environment (Zöllner 2006, Escobar 2011). The issues discussed in this thesis relate not just to the BBC WS but to other international organisations, such as governments, broadcasters and development agencies which adopt a participatory strategy for public engagement.

### **1.3 Participatory journalism and international democratic debate**

I argue in this thesis that more participatory forms of inclusive journalism enabled by social media create an opportunity for international democratic debate. Participatory journalism is defined as 'the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information' (Bowman and Willis 2003:9). Citizen participation is hard to achieve either because it is not granted or because of power imbalances favouring some actors over others (Carpentier 2011). In this thesis I focus on whether audiences are able to actively contribute to the making of news and have therefore applied deliberative democracy and dialogue theory.

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<sup>12</sup> <<http://www.politico.eu/article/bbc-world-service-set-for-fightback-in-information-war/>> accessed 29<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

Many argue that, as well as informing citizens so they can vote in national democratic elections, journalism play an important role in fostering both deliberative democracy (Dahlgren 2005) and global media citizenship (Dahlgren 2009). However, in order for journalism to be more inclusive of diverse voices, I argue that the definitions of both democratic deliberation and news journalism need to be widened and more receptive and inclusive to more and diverse voices as discussed in chapter 2. Little is yet known about the role of participatory journalism in international public debate and how it influences democratic deliberation.

Quite a few studies cover the subject of social media and democracy but they mostly concentrate on social media as a space for activism, political protest or election monitoring see for example Aman and Jayroe (2013), Bacallao-Pino (2014), Loader and Mercea (2012). Research on the link between news, social media and democracy has mainly focused on media systems in the Global North, particularly the USA – see for example Goode (2009), Gil de Zúñiga, et al. (2012), and Kaufhold, et al. (2010). Studies focusing on news, social media and democracy in an African context have mainly focused on local grassroots actors in Africa – see for example Bosch (2010) or Mudhai et al. (2009). In contrast to previous research, this study focuses on if and how social media enable participatory journalism as a space for international democratic debate (Gillmor 2004, Deuze 2008, Goode 2009), a field of study that has not yet received extensive attention, particularly not when it comes to countries or continents outside Europe and the USA for example Africa (Mpofu 2013).

The research questions I will use to understand the role of participatory journalism in international democratic debate are set out in the following section.

## **1.4 Research questions**

My main research question for this thesis is:

*What are the implications of new forms of participatory journalism for international democratic debate?*

The following questions have been designed to support the overarching research question:

*What role does participatory journalism, produced by international broadcasting, play in international democratic debate?*

*How do new forms of participatory journalism blur the boundaries between media producers and audiences, and what are the implications for democratic debate?*

And finally, the overarching theoretical question for this thesis is;

*What constitutes a democratic debate, and how can we recognise its nature and quality?*

The purpose of focussing the research in this way is to understand the development and practices of 'participatory journalism' in international broadcasting and the implications these have for international democratic debate, particularly between the UK, and people interacting with the BBC African services around the world.

### **1.5 Research approach - mediated moments**

The objective of this research is to inform academic debates about the democratic value of participatory journalism, bringing together international media, communications, deliberative democracy and journalism studies. In addition, these findings can act to inform journalistic practices with more inclusive and democratic forms of international journalism, not least at the BBC WS.

The BBC African services and their participatory journalism provide an opportunity to study how the global and the local meet through the convergence of postcolonial

broadcasting structures and new social media technology in Africa and among African Diasporas. A disclaimer is needed before moving on to the next section. When I refer to Africa in this thesis, I am by no means pretending that the whole of Africa is the same. The BBC service for Africa provides programmes and content in English to a Pan-African audience, and therefore at times it may seem like they (the BBC African services) are referring to their target audience in Africa as one. Thus, it may also seem as if I am referring to the audience in Africa as one, as I am studying a homogeneous news offer. However, I acknowledge the narrow focus of English speakers who are online in Africa as a limitation to this study and I do not claim that it is possible to understand diverse cultures and social media use in Africa as part of this research. Instead the focus is on the producer and audiences who are coming together and making news together on BBC Africa's social media platforms even though they are far from representative of audiences across the whole of Africa. The next section outlines the approach I have taken in order to answer my research questions.

My study focuses on three particular moments of participatory journalism and democratic debate at the English language BBC African services, which, in line with practice methodology (Bird 2010), I refer to as mediated moments. These mediated moments are: first, **the Nigerian Elections** and participation in the Ushahidi crowdmapping platform in April 2011, second, the launch of a new participatory debate programme in March - June 2012 – **the BBC Africa Debate** – which is still an on-going programme at the BBC WS, and third, **Love African Football**, the BBC's coverage of the African Cup of Nations on Facebook in January - February 2013. These three case studies and the rationale for their selection are outlined in Chapter 3.

I consider an ethnographic research focus to be the most appropriate methodological approach, as it enables in-depth insights into the everyday practices of participatory

cultures at the BBC WS over time. In participatory journalism production, audience reception and media texts are created simultaneously, and therefore the research must be designed using integrated research methods. This research study uses integrated methods in two ways: first, production online and offline, audiences participating online and social media texts were all studied together simultaneously. Second, qualitative interviews and observational accounts are mixed with quantitative social analytics analysis in order to provide a fuller picture of participatory journalism. Access to the newsroom and the social media analysis tools used by the BBC WS producers themselves makes this a unique study of social media participation at a news organisation.

This PhD is about the development and practices of participatory journalism through social media in international broadcasting, and the implications these have for democratic debate amongst local, national and regional communities in Africa and African diasporas. The structure of my thesis is outlined below.

## **1.6 Contents and chapter structure**

**Chapter 2** – the literature review provides the theoretical background for the research questions and identifies research gaps by reviewing four relevant areas of academic research. I start with a discussion of mediated space and publicness in an African context. I draw on literature which states the importance of public debate in functioning democratic systems (Dewey 1940, Barber 1984, Fishkin 1991, Kim, Wyatt et al. 1999, Chambers 2003) and discuss research which points towards a deficiency in open public debate in Africa due to national media censorship and domination by the Global North (Hydén, Leslie et al. 2003, Ogundimu 2003). I continue by defining participatory journalism and reviewing literature which discusses new journalistic practices, including works by scholars who argue that professional journalists have been slow to change

their practices to adapt to a participatory environment, instead holding on to their gatekeeping practices.

I further address deliberative democracy theory, particularly focusing on public sphere scholar Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1989) and those scholars who critique his concept of communicative rationality in order to define democratic debate. Some authors argue that the internet and social media make it easier to achieve a public sphere. However, others argue that the ideals of communicative rationality disguise control and power because they favour a particular type of elitist reasoning in line with the Western liberal tradition, which in turn marginalises cultural diversity (Fraser 1992, Downey and Fenton 2003, Cottle 2006, Mouffe 1992). I therefore pose Habermas's communicative rationality theory against difference democrats who argue that in order for public debate to be more inclusive, and so as not to marginalise voices, we must open up the concept of democratic debate to include rhetoric, jokes, personal narratives and music (Young and Press 2000, Dahlberg 2005, Ryfe 2006). Finally, I use the dialogue theory of scholars such as Freire (2000) and Buber (2004) to understand the kinds of relationships and practices that foster mutuality in communication, particularly within participatory journalism.

**Chapter 3** – this chapter provides an outline of the overall methodology: an integrated participant observation of a) the producers, b) the users and c) the text of participatory journalism at the BBC African services.

I first describe my overall research approach, which follows a social constructivist tradition (Domingo 2008). I then move on to explain what I mean by 'studying sideways' (Hannerz 2002) and the situated knowledge needed to gain access to the research setting. Section 3.2.2, *Integrated mediated moments*, explains the integration of participant observation of a) the producers, b) the users and c) the text. Section 3.2.3,

*Integrated methods – qualitative and quantitative research*, outlines and discusses the mixing within the same study of both quantitative methods through the use of social media analytics and qualitative methods like observation, interviews and participation. The integration of both types of approaches separates this study from previous newsroom ethnographies. I then move on to explain the research design, including the rationale and background for choosing the three mediated moments at the BBC African services.

Finally, I outline the research methods employed and explain how the data was collected and analysed. The limitations and ethical implications of both online and offline methods of ethnographic research are examined. The ethics of carrying out research in the newsroom versus analysis on social media platforms are dealt with in two separate sub sections. In terms of carrying out research in the newsroom, a particular ethical consideration for researching an organisation was to make sure that no business sensitive data was leaked as a result of this study. The ethical consideration of the right to anonymity and privacy for both journalists and audience participants means I have gone to considerable lengths to protect my research participants' identities. The main ethical concern in sourcing data from social media platforms was to determine whether the data I collected was private or public, and to take appropriate action to protect participants' privacy.

**Chapter 4** – this chapter looks back at the BBC's involvement in Africa and how it has changed over time, showing how the BBC WS and its relationship to audiences in Africa keeps on changing and evolving. The latest focus on promoting a global conversation through social media is just a continuation of the broadcaster's attempts to remain relevant in a changing political, social, cultural and economic context. I discuss the changes in the way the BBC WS is funded and governed and what this means for the organisation's editorial independence, both historically and today. Throughout the



broadcaster's existence, the British government has tried to exert influence over the supposedly impartial BBC, but journalistic values still remain to be to provide impartial and balanced news coverage. The BBC's independence is an on-going negotiation between its journalists, managers, funders and regulators.

This chapter concludes that global media power and influence still needs to be considered when analysing the role international broadcasting plays in democratic debate in Africa. Participatory journalism is where the *global* (the international broadcaster) meets the *local* (audiences in Africa), producing new ways of writing stories. However, participation does not necessarily always lead to more democratic journalistic practices. Participatory journalism and a dialogic turn in broadcasting can also be seen as a way for the BBC WS to maintain symbolic power in a changing media landscape. Therefore, cultural imperialism is still an important concept to consider when studying participation in the context of a Western media organisation's influence in Africa.

**Chapter 5** – this chapter discusses findings in relation to the sub-research question –

How do new forms of participatory journalism blur the boundaries between media producers and audiences, and what are the implications for democratic debate? – in relation to each of the three mediated moments.

I start with the BBC initiative *Nigeria Votes*, a crowd sourced map on the social media platform Ushahidi during Nigeria's 2011 election. This case study shows that despite a strong gatekeeping tendency, the editor in charge tinkered with and adapted the BBC's editorial guidelines to make them relevant to a participatory news environment. This illustrates that news values and journalistic practices are constantly evolving and can become more democratic.

This chapter also covers the new debate programme *BBC Africa Debate*, examining whether allowing studio and social media participation made the programme more audience led compared to traditional radio debate programmes. The analysis shows that despite the dialogic format of the new programme, audience selection and a strict focus on facts rather than opinions limited the number and diversity of voices that could be heard. However, despite these journalistic values applied on the BBC's own platforms (websites and radio), Twitter was an environment where both professional and audiences could co-create *BBC Africa Debate*.

In addition, I demonstrate how *Love African Football*, a Facebook community for football fans, provided a transnational space for collective practices of football fandom. The BBC drove participation by posting results, questions, commentary, photos and analysis, but there was also dialogue between producers and audiences, with journalists answering questions as well as getting involved in the debate.

I therefore conclude in this chapter that the *BBC Africa Debate* on Twitter and *Love African Football* on Facebook still function as communicative spaces for public debate about African identity and politics.

## **Chapter 6** – this chapter looks into what elements of participatory journalism

contribute to more democratic forms of debate with evidence from participant observation at the BBC Africa services. In short I conclude that democratic debate is constituted by: a) inclusion and equality including personal storytelling, b) reciprocity and respect, and c) self-reflection and mutual exploration from both journalists and citizens participating in debates.

The evidence from the three mediated moments outlined in chapter 6 show that there are increasing signs of inclusion and equality in debates by journalists being more open and inclusive on social media and by allowing non-professional content to be included in

BBC Africa news reports without heavy handed editing. The journalist's use of Twitter and Facebook show that it is possible to extend radio programme debates to an online forum where reciprocity and respect of diverse opinions can be built. The posting strategy, monitoring and moderation of *Love African Football* for example show that it is possible to co-create participatory news where producers and audiences use self-reflection and mutual understanding to explore African identities and global inequalities.

**Chapter 7** – This chapter concludes the thesis, arguing that a dialogic approach

allows the inclusion of different forms of knowledge and different ways of speaking in participatory journalism, and therefore contributes to more democratic forms of debate. However, more dialogic forms of debate require first a change in how journalism and democratic debate is defined and then a change of practice. All three mediated moments observed in this study of participatory journalism at the BBC African services show that it is largely not technology that fosters participatory journalism; far more important are producers and audiences' practices in relation to participatory journalism.

For democratic debate to occur, the practices of participatory journalism need to include: a) inclusion and equality including personal storytelling, b) reciprocity and respect, and c) self-reflection and mutual exploration from both journalists and citizens participating in debates.

The following chapters will explain why those criteria's are important starting with the theoretical context of democratic debate and participatory journalism in an African context.



# Chapter 2 — Theoretical Considerations of Mediated Democratic Debate and Participatory Journalism

## 2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has already introduced the main and supporting research questions for this thesis. This chapter, the literature review, brings these questions into focus and identifies research gaps by reviewing four relevant areas of academic research: a) journalism's role in public debate and democracy building in Africa; b) the blurred boundaries between media producers and audiences and the role of participation in democratic practice; c) deliberative democracy theory, including a critique of Habermas's concept of communicative rationality; and finally d) dialogue theory and the changing culture of journalistic objectivity.

Section 2.2 begins this review with a discussion of mediated space and publicness in an African context, where I argue for the importance of public debate in functioning democratic systems (Dewey 1940, Barber 1984, Fishkin 1991, Kim, Wyatt et al. 1999, Chambers 2003). Previous research in African media and democracy studies points to a deficiency in open public debate in Africa due to national media censorship and the domination of the Global North (Hydén, Leslie et al. 2003, Ogundimu 2003). I argue that in this environment, communicative spaces enabled by small media and social media are important spheres for public debate (Spitulnik 2003), and the particular circumstances of the media environment make oral traditions like stories, jokes, music and poetry important parts of African publicness. Social media likes and shares can also constitute democratic activity, and therefore definitions of both journalism and

democratic debate need to be extended to include social media activity as well as rhetoric, storytelling, music and jokes. Depending how small media is used it can challenge the hegemonic model of journalism from the Global North according to Mouffe in (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2007). Despite the plurality of voices that social media can bring, I argue that it is important to remember that digital divides still exist, and that although there are new spaces for communication, these spaces do not necessarily foster genuine dialogue.

Section 2.3 defines participatory journalism and reviews literature which discusses new journalistic practices in relation to this concept. Based on recent research, I argue that it is no longer possible to separate traditional journalism from social media, because each constantly influences and shapes the other, thus forming a new category which has been referred to as hybrid news (Hermida 2010, Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012, Russell 2013). Despite this new state of journalism where audiences can get involved, I am critical of Bruns's (2005) term 'produsage' because of the large amount of evidence showing that participation is often not granted and even if it is, it is difficult to achieve due to gatekeeping practices (Carpentier 2011). In order to understand whether participatory journalism leads to more democratic debate, it is necessary to understand what constitutes such debates.

Section 2.4 outlines deliberative democracy theory, focusing particularly on public sphere scholar Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1989). I argue for the continuing relevance of certain elements of communicative rationality, such as reciprocity and ideal role taking, mutuality, and discursive inclusion and equality (Dahlberg 2005). However, I also agree with scholars who have previously pointed out that it is important not to favour a particular type of elitist reasoning which marginalises cultural diversity (Fraser 1992, Downey and Fenton 2003, Cottle 2006, Mouffe 1992) and in some instances alienates women (Fraser 1990). I therefore argue that in order for public debate to be more

inclusive, it must embrace aesthetic affective modes of communication, including storytelling, rhetoric, music and jokes (Young and Press 2000, Dahlberg 2005, Ryfe 2006). Mouffe's (1999) concept of agonistic pluralism provides an important frame for evaluating the inclusion of different discourses in democratic debate at the BBC African services. In addition, I use Spivak's (1988) subaltern studies framework to understand whether imperialistic ideas of African otherness versus rationality and objectivity are being reinforced despite efforts to allow audience voices to be heard.

Section 2.5 uses dialogue theory from scholars Buber (2004) and Freire (2000) to understand the kinds of relationships and practices that foster mutuality in communication. I then interrogate the longstanding practice of objectivity in journalism and argue that journalistic practices which favour a culture of objectivity and impartiality actively work against the fostering of more dialogic forms of participation (Soffer 2009). I use this theory to understand the barriers to inclusivity and mutuality in participatory journalism and thus critically evaluate the practices used in the three case studies of participation at the BBC African services. I finish by proposing Escobar's (2011) theory of dialogic deliberation as a way of understanding and listening to different voices in public debate in the future.

Finally I conclude that in order to understand whether participatory journalism at the BBC African services can be more democratic, it is necessary to use a framework to assess what constitutes democratic debate, which I outline in this section. I have chosen to adopt Escobar's (2009) dialogic deliberation framework that also draws on Buber (2004) and Freire (2000) to understand the role of journalism in democratic debate. I also conclude that in order to understand participatory journalism, it is necessary to study journalistic practices and how they are changing, as well as the actual social media text produced by participatory initiatives at the BBC African

services. Before going into the qualities of democratic debate, it is first necessary to understand journalism and the role of news in democratic governance.

## **2.2 Journalism's role in democratic debate in an African context**

The focus of this research is the BBC World Service, a British international broadcaster, and its provision for African audiences. This transnational relationship means that it is necessary to focus not just on media and democracy traditions in the Global North, but also to incorporate African media contexts. It is therefore important to acknowledge the particular circumstances and traditions of journalism in Africa and the role of journalism in public debate there. This also means that it is important to revisit theories of cultural imperialism and be critical of the BBC World Service's reasons for broadcasting to Africa in the first place, a subject which is addressed in Chapter 4. Media and democracy is a vast research area, much of which is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the following section gives a brief outline of media and democracy theory in relation to Africa in order to position this research within current debates of African media and democracy studies.

Before coming to any conclusions as to whether social media is increasing democratic debate, it is first necessary to define it as a concept. In order to understand the role debate plays in democracy, I draw on deliberative democracy theory and argue that public debate is central to building a functioning democracy. Through public debate, information about public affairs forms citizen's opinions that informs decision making (Barber 1984, Fishkin 1991, Kim, Wyatt et al. 1999, Chambers 2003). Without deliberation there is not really any way for citizen's to participate in the functioning of democracy (Dahlgren 2009). In an increasingly global and connected world where trade agreements and international bodies influence citizens from many different nations in both the Global North and South, I argue that international deliberation is important to build democratic environments that transgress national borders.



I am persuaded by ideas of democratic deliberation that are more fluid, including personal spheres where the personal becomes political – see for example (Squires 1998) in (Loader and Mercea 2012). For this study I adopt Iris Young's notion of democratic deliberation, where testimony, storytelling, greetings and rhetoric can become part of democratic engagement (Young and Press 2000). I therefore agree with Loader and Mercea (2012) in their introduction to the special issue of *Information, Communication & Society* on social networking and democracy, where they assert that YouTube videos and posts on Facebook and Twitter may all be aspects of political discourse, therefore constituting democratic debate. For example, Tully and Ekdale (2014) show the importance of social media in fighting corruption in Kenya through everyday leisure and entertainment practices which use hashtags to spread jokes and cultural references (Tully and Ekdale 2014). Social media discourse and its role in journalism is the focus of this study, but before going into more detail about the changing social media landscape, it is necessary to understand established theories of the media and the role of journalism in democracy.

Despite some differences among the media systems of the USA and European countries, media in the Global North is usually viewed as a media watchdog, where citizens hold those in power to account through a free pluralist news media (Schultz 1998, Curran 2002). In liberal democracies, the ideal of a media system is that journalists act on behalf of the public to promote transparency and accountability in society (Dahlgren 2009). Commercial media markets have often led to the concentration of ownership (Curran 2002), as with the UK's newspaper industry, over which the Murdoch press exerts a large degree of control (Humphreys 1996). The large organisations which own the news media have such great commercial power that it is difficult for ordinary citizens to challenge them (Gans 2004). In addition, because the media are trying to satisfy the majority of consumers, there is greater emphasis on human interest stories than on public affairs, meaning that minority voices are not

catered for (Curran 2002). Despite the imperfectness of Western media markets, the ideals of media pluralism and the media as a watchdog are still often used as a normative guide when evaluating African media (Berger 2002, Hydén, Leslie et al. 2003). However, in order to really understand BBC Africa's role in democratic debate in Africa today, it is important to go beyond models from the Global North. The political, economic, cultural and social reasons for this are outlined in the following sections of this chapter. But first, in order to be able to discuss the BBC WS's role in Africa, it is necessary to outline the BBC's role in public debate.

The BBC is the centre of public service broadcasting in the UK and it has played a large part in creating a mediated public in the UK via its radio transmissions, and later TV (Scannell 1990). John Reith, who founded the BBC in 1923, had a vision that 'a new and mighty weight of public opinion' would emerge, with radio enabling people to make up their own minds, where they had previously had to accept 'the dictated and partial versions of others' (Reith 1925:4 in Scannell 1990: 14). The main contribution of this new publicness was the creation of a civil society where the public could tune in to the same events at the same time. Later, this publicness was extended to Africa via the Empire Service (now the BBC WS). According to Barnett (2003), media technology brings people in contact with distant people, places and events, allowing a new association with communities of interests in different locations (Barnett 2003). Thus, the BBC WS brought different audiences across Africa in contact with British values, communicated for example via news, music, literature and sport. Chapter 4 will look at how the BBC WS took an active role in building broadcasting systems, as well as broadcasting content to Africa. By doing this, the BBC played an instrumental role in fostering certain versions of publicness in Africa over the past 80 years (Armour 1984).

International broadcasting, such as the BBC WS's role in international public debate, has not yet been the subject of a great amount of academic research. Democracy is

mostly conceived of as relating to the governance of nation states, and so public debate is usually explored in the context of nation states and national media (Bohman 2004). However, the concept of cosmopolitan democracy incorporates debate amongst transnational publics and argues for the principles, values and procedures of democracy to be applied to global politics (Archibugi and Held 2000). Because of its role in promoting cosmopolitan values around the world, the BBC WS has previously been studied as a cosmopolitan contact zone (Gillespie and Webb 2012). I argue here that while cosmopolitanism is an important concept for understanding democratic debate beyond national borders, so is media citizenship. Media citizenship implies that everyone, irrespective of national, cultural, class, gender or other belongings, has the right to information, to receive and register opinions, and to fair and diverse representation (Murdock 1994, Garnham 1999). Cosmopolitan democracy and media citizenship are important concepts for understanding the BBC WS's role in fostering a global conversation and democratic debate through its international news offer, which now incorporates participatory journalism.

In this thesis I will argue that news journalism has changed as a result of new social media practices and because of the transnational connections between producers at the BBC and the audiences all over the world enabled by those platforms, including in Africa. In order to understand how news practices have changed, it is first necessary to define the concept of news.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines news as 'newly received or noteworthy information, especially about recent events'.<sup>13</sup> However, it is journalists who decide what is noteworthy, based on shared professional values. In 1965, Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge wrote a breakthrough typology of news values, frequently quoted since,

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13 <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/news>> accessed 5th June 2015.

categorising the ways in which events become news, in their case specifically foreign events. The twelve news values they identified were:

1 frequency, 2 threshold, 3 unambiguity, 4 meaningfulness, 5 unexpectedness, 6 consonance, 7 continuity, 8 composition, 9 elite nations, 10 elite people, 11 reference to persons, 12 reference to something negative (Galtung and Ruge 1965).

Although these values guiding journalism have been hugely important in defining newsworthiness, and therefore adding to the definition of news, Galtung and Ruge's study has also been criticised for generally being better at describing what is in the news rather than helping us understand how certain events make it into the news (Harcup and O'Neill 2001). In addition, they presume that there is a reality of existing events that journalists can report on as long as they follow a certain occupational code, including objectivity, impartiality and accuracy (Golding and Elliott 1979). The notion of news being objective and impartial has been criticised by post-structuralists such as Chantal Mouffe, who argue that news is not a neutral medium where facts are disseminated (Mouffe 1992, Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006). Instead of assuming that news is value-free, I agree with the notion that journalistic values can be explained as an ideology where hegemony plays a role in defining what is considered to be good journalism (Harcup and O'Neill 2001, Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006) and it is this view which I adopt throughout this thesis. Hegemony means the domination of one way of thinking over others by making this seem common sense and natural (Boyd-Barett (2009). In the context of media and communication, this form of power can also be referred to as symbolic power (Thompson 1995). Rather than objectively reporting on reality, journalists use their professional journalistic practices to construct news by selecting facts and statements and creating the context in which this news makes sense (Vasterman 2005). News values are constantly shifting and developing according to the

hegemony of the time. In the following sub section, I outline the development of media in an African context in relation to news values and social media participation.

African media, such as national radio, TV and newspapers, are often deemed dysfunctional from a democratic point of view by scholars from other nations according to Nyamnjoh (2010), Louw (2011) and Obijiofor (2011). Reasons for this include government ownership and censorship, the unsustainability of private media without government subsidies and interference in editorial decisions by media owners (Nyamnjoh 2010, Obijiofor 2011). After many African countries gained independence in the 1960s, their governments got used to a fairly uncritical position from journalists. The news media was controlled in order to strengthen nation states and assist development work (Hydén, Leslie et al. 2003), a legacy which endured throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Independence from colonialism in many cases actually meant the decline of media plurality, and newspapers were closed in favour of a heavily government-controlled national media (Hydén, Leslie et al. 2003). The dominance of this kind of national media was to a certain extent a response to Western bias in the provision of colonial media before independence. Ironically it was against this backdrop that international broadcasters like the BBC World Service and Voice of America became popular because they challenged the monolithic voice of national broadcasters.

Since the 1990s there has been a move towards media deregulation and in favour of private media, independent of the government in most Sub-Saharan African countries (Ogundimu 2003, Myers 2008). Local commercial radio stations have sprung up and the BBC WS's position as a major influence in the region has declined in the face of home-grown competition (Myers 2008). However, local FM stations do not really get involved in politics, focusing instead on music and popular culture, although they often have phone in programmes where people can voice their opinions (Hydén, Leslie et al. 2003, Ogola 2014). However, despite deregulation there are still few examples of the

news media holding politicians to account in Sub-Saharan African nations. In addition, many countries have proved unable to sustain pluralist commercial market environments without state subsidies (Ogundimu 2003).

In light of media censorship and media content domination from the Global North, alternative communicative spaces have provided ways for deliberation to take place in Africa (Spitulnik 2003). Important forms of deliberation in Africa are 'theatre, songs, music, jokes and poetry' (Hydén, Leslie et al. 2003: 5). (Sreberny and Mohammadi 1994) coined the term 'small media communication' to refer to the use of such forms of communication during the Iranian revolution in 1979. Small media in Africa have proved effective in informing people about health issues and family planning, but they have also had an impact on political communication, where interactivity, dialogue and grassroots participation is important. In line with Mano (2007), I argue that previous literature on media and democracy in Africa has often used definitions of news which are too narrow. Small media, including music, theatre, jokes and poetry, can constitute and function as means of news, contributing to how social and political issues are addressed and taking a role in challenging those in power. Mano explains this below.

Popular music can perform the journalistic function of communicating daily issues in ways that challenge the powerful and give a voice to the disadvantaged. Popular music competes and rivals mainstream journalism in the ways it addresses political, social and economic realities in repressive contexts. Whereas newspapers and magazines ridicule and lampoon the powerful within opinion columns and cartoons, music radio relies on subtle wordplay to denounce the mighty and powerful (Mano 2007: 61).

Despite their significance for deliberation on public issues, small media like the songs mentioned by Mano are often discounted by media and democracy theory because

these informal communications only reach limited publics, as discussed by Spitulnik (2003). In Section 2.4, I will outline Habermas's later writings about how interconnected private spaces form part of the public sphere, making these small media communications relevant to democratic debate. In addition, the internet also means that these small private spheres can be connected and distributed to larger publics. Social media can therefore be seen as just a continuation of small media in a digitally networked form, as argued by Sreberny and Khiabany (2010).

Social media gained scholarly attention during the events leading up to political change in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in 2010-2011 (Howard, Duffy et al. 2011, Lim 2012, Aman and Jayroe 2013), where networked publics came together to mobilise political protest. There are also examples from Sub-Saharan Africa, such as the elections in Kenya (Mäkinen and Kuira 2008) and Zimbabwe in 2008 (Moyo 2009), in which social media and citizen reporting played a part. In addition, Ifukor (2009) argues that during the 2007 Nigerian election, Twitter enabled citizens to participate in public discussions, mobilised and functioned as watchdogs during the formal electoral process (Ifukor 2010).

Citizen journalism via social media is seen as more pluralistic and less influenced by authoritarian forces than traditional broadcast journalism (Banda, Mudhai et al. 2009). Social media in Africa have subsequently come to be seen as a catalyst for social change and possible moves towards democratisation (Mudhai et al. 2009). However, social media do not just provide a parallel news space; they also provide an opportunity to debate and challenge stereotypes of Africa today. Africa has previously been largely excluded from international news reporting or misrepresented by foreign media, and according to Clarke and Bromley (2012) it therefore has more to gain from the use of social media. For example, 'Africa is a Country', a blog edited by academic and activist Sean Jacobs, was founded in order to challenge old images of 'Africa'. Their mission is

to 'deliberately challenge and destabilise received wisdom about the African continent and its people in Western media'.<sup>14</sup> As the use of social media develops alongside alternative discourses to the mainstream media environment, do the BBC African services allow those voices to be heard through its participatory news offering. This is an opportunity for citizen journalists to reach out to the BBC, but will producers listen?

However, those scholars who take a more critical view of social media's role in social and political change in Sub-Saharan Africa argue that the internet is not a pluralistic space in an egalitarian sense because the vast majority of those who participate are new cultural elites, mostly urban, with access to literacy, capital and technology (Hydén, Leslie et al. 2003, Avle 2011). Elite use of the internet in an African context questions the ability of social media to give a voice to marginalised groups (Brinkman, Lamoureaux et al. 2011). Those who are marginalised by the global conversations are not just separated by access to technology and internet connections, in line with the common notions of digital divide theory (Graham 2011). Instead of just making divisions between those have and those who have not, the 'digital divide' should be pluralised, localised and grounded in more appropriate spatial frameworks (Graham 2011: 223). Apart from lack of internet connection, the main barrier to access to the BBC's African content is knowledge of the English language or the local African languages in which the BBC World Service broadcasts. In addition, very little content online is relevant to an African audience. In addition to access, scholars who are sceptical about social media's role in political emancipation often argue that those who engage in politics on online social media platforms are usually already fully engaged in political activity as activists, politicians, party workers, journalists etc. (Loader and Mercea 2012). Social media thus does not necessarily work to increase political engagement, nor does it necessarily allow people to encounter opinions which are different to their own.

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14 Africa is a Country <<http://africasacountry.com/about/>> accessed 24th April 2015.



Much recent debate in both the media and academia has addressed opinion bubbles and echo chambers on social media, with users often gravitating towards talking only to other likeminded people (Quintelier and Vissers 2008, Kroh and Neiss 2012).

Facebook's algorithms have been blamed for exposing people to news and opinions with which they already agree, thus reinforcing existing beliefs rather than challenging them. However, Bakshy, Messing et al.'s (2015) study shows that it is people's dispositions rather than algorithms that create echo-chambers. Twitter has also been blamed for creating opinion bubbles where most users only converse within their own partisan camp (Conover, Ratkiewicz et al. 2011). Previous research on the BBC World Service's online Hindi and Urdu discussion forums in relation to the 2008 Mumbai attacks has shown that these forums were sites of shared national and religious identities rather than places where users could encounter and engage with 'others' (Gillespie, Herbert et al. 2010). Chapters 5 and 6 will look into whether the BBC African services' participatory initiatives enable people to reach outside their opinion bubble and engage in a genuine dialogue.

Providing spaces where people can comfortably discuss politics can have a positive impact on politics and the democratisation process, particularly in Africa (Ogundimu 2003). Therefore, despite the unequal distribution of ICT technology and the potential for echo chambers, I argue that social media can still play a positive role in democratic debate. The BBC thus now has a unique opportunity to connect to both small media traditions and social media to access creative African agency, although this cannot be too narrow and focused on liberal ideals of journalism and media and democracy. I argue that participatory journalism has an opportunity to foster more suitable forms of democratic debate in an African context, as long it is possible to incorporate African creativity and African ideas of agency and personhood, including by broadening current definitions of news and news values.

As in the Global North, normative judgements of the media in Africa are often based on assessments of press systems in terms of their distance from the liberal ideal of a neutral watchdog, free from state interference, as demonstrated in Section 2.1 (Hallin and Mancini 2004). However, in addition to the political and economic arguments, there are social and cultural reasons for the inappropriateness of transporting media ideals from the Global North to Africa. According to liberalist news values, for example, journalists are supposed to give up their cultural belonging in order to foster the individual citizen idea of liberal democracy, as will be discussed later in this chapter. This approach pushes journalists to address citizens as individuals rather than communities. A too narrow focus on the individual does not reflect the cultural diversity, agency and personhood of the African context (Nyamnjoh 2015). If journalism were instead to address the various cultural groups who are fighting for recognition, liberal ideals would be threatened. Nyamnjoh (2015) argues that rather than stressing liberal news values, placing media and democracy in an African context would imply providing 'the missing cultural link to current efforts, links informed by respect for African humanity and creativity, and by popular ideas of personhood and domesticated agency' (Nyamnjoh 2015: 7). In order to do this, the culture of journalism might need to become more inclusive and flexible.

Social media and the way they are used by journalists and the public also help to change news, and therefore the role of news journalism in public deliberation needs to be re-addressed. Social media has the potential to increase public debate, and therefore participatory journalism constitutes a more deliberative form of journalism. However, it needs to be theoretically investigated whether participatory journalism constitutes democratic forms of deliberation. The next section argues that in order for journalism to be more inclusive, journalists' practices must be able to cater for and be inclusive of more voices, meaning that the journalist's role as a gatekeeper of information needs to be adapted.

## **2.3 Participatory journalism - its democratic opportunities and limitations**

In order to understand participatory journalism, it is first necessary to consider the concept of participation, its definition and the implications for journalism and audience practices. To participate is to take part in something, an active involvement in an event (Livingstone 2013). Therefore, audience participation for the purpose of this thesis is not just about viewing TV, listening to the radio or following a feed on Twitter, or even writing a comment under an online article. Instead it includes taking active part in the gathering, processing and publishing of media content.

Participatory journalism is defined as 'the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information' (Bowman and Willis 2003:9). The involvement of citizens in news making ultimately has an impact on journalistic practices. While journalistic production traditionally took place in the newsroom, it is increasingly also happening online and on social media, so what counts as production is changing in an era of digital and networked media, with consequences for the role and practices of journalists (Ardèvol, Roig et al. 2010).

Bruns's (2007:4) term 'produsage' has been used to illustrate the convergence between the roles of producers and consumers of media. Produsage is when the production of content takes place in a collaborative, participatory environment, which breaks down the boundaries between producers and consumers, instead enabling all participants to be both the users and the producers of information and knowledge (Bruns 2006). The concept of produsage sees technology and convergence in a positive way, as a practice that leads to empowerment and increased democracy (Deuze 2008; Gillmor 2004; Goode 2009). However, it is important to acknowledge that efforts to allow the public to participate in media practices are not always genuine and even if they are, participation does not always work. The distribution of power in

any form of political participation or public decision-making is more complex than simply allowing the public to take part or not. In the case of journalism, the professional practice of gatekeeping, defined later in this chapter, often stands in the way for audience's full involvement in content creation. Therefore, understanding 'who is empowered and granted the opportunity (and, 'the' power) to speak' is central question about whether participation leads to more democratic forms of debate at the BBC African service (Carpentier 2007:108).

Participation is an intricate part of democratic theory and practice. All democratic systems are participatory to varying degrees (Carpentier 2011). Minimalist forms of democracy include systems that function through representation where participation is performed by elites who have been selected via elections. There are also more maximalist forms of democracy, which advocate a form of governance where in addition to representation, citizens can take an active part in political decision-making (Carpentier 2011). In addition, according to more maximalist democratic theory, social life is also seen as part of the political, thus broadening out the concept of political participation to include participation in media and culture, in line with Chantal Mouffe's (1999) definition of the political sphere outlined later in this chapter. Adopting a maximalist definition of the political field where the media sphere forms part of democratic systems is essential to the idea that participatory journalism can play a role in international democracy building.

In this chapter, I will evaluate the concept of participatory journalism and argue that participation it is not always granted or does not always work. In addition, participation is not necessarily enough because it does not ensure deliberation to be democratic. Instead, I will argue that in order for an inclusive democratic debate to take place there are important deliberative and dialogic practices journalists and audiences need to follow; these are outlined in the conclusion of this chapter. Before turning to theories of

deliberative democracy and dialogue, in this section I assess the power struggles of participatory journalism practices using Carpentier's (2007, 2011) concept of minimalist versus maximalist forms of media participation, which builds on Arnstein's ladder of participation (1969).

In his assessment of the opportunities and limitations of media participation, Carpentier (2007, 2011) first refer to Pateman's (1970) distinction between full and partial participation in order to show that power is at the centre of any form of participation. According to Pateman, partial participation is 'a process in which two or more parties influence each other in the making of decisions but the final power to decide rests with one party only'. In contrast, full participation is defined as 'a process where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions' (1970:70) cited by Carpentier (2007:106). In the context of the BBC African service, full participation would mean that the audience has an equal share in making decisions about news gathering, processing and publishing as the professional producers, which is what the term *produsage* implies. In most instances however, full participation is either not granted or not possible due to lack of knowledge or skills of those audiences participating. I therefore agree with Carpentier (2011) that Pateman's concept of full participation is utopian and in most cases unrealistic. However, increasing the level of participation of non-professional actors in journalism production, particularly from the Global South, could mean more voices being heard in international discourse and therefore, I argue, is still something worth striving for.

Similar to Pateman, Arnstein (1969) demonstrates the role of power within participation but instead of arguing for authentic 'full' participation, Arnstein presents a hierarchy of participation in the metaphor of a ladder. Arnstein's ladder of participation relating to spatial planning (1969) referred to by Carpentier (2007, 2011) has been widely used in order to demonstrate that there are different possibilities of how much power the public

are given in a decision-making process versus those making decisions about the physical spaces in cities. The ladder consists of eight steps; those steps are cited in (Carpentier 2007, 2011). The steps in the Arnstein model of public participation are: 1. Manipulation; 2. Therapy; 3. Informing; 4. Consultation; 5. Placation; 6. Partnership; 7. Delegated Power and 8. Citizen control. Numbers 1 to 3 of the steps mean that there is actually no citizen participation taking place at all, 4 to 5 means that there is a degree of tokenism towards participation, and 6 to 8 means that there is a possibility for citizen participation in the decision-making process. Carpentier (2011) uses the ladder to show a critical dimension of participation, where what is set out to be a participatory initiative could just be token participation or proven to actually provide no possibility for participation at all. Despite demonstrating that there are different hierarchies of participation, Arnstein's model still indicates that participation when it occurs, leads to positive outcomes for citizens. This positive view of participation is problematic because it ignores a) whether the citizens participating have got the relevant skills to take part and therefore can make decisions in meaningful ways and b) if the participation that takes place is relevant for democracy, empowerment, and equality. However, the importance about both Pateman and Arnstein's theories is that they highlight the importance of co-decision making, not just access to or interaction with content as the signifier for maximalist forms of participation (Carpentier 2011).

Media participation, like democratic governance and spatial planning can also be categorised according to minimalist or maximalist models of participation (Carpentier 2007). According to minimalist models the emphasis is more on symbolic forms of media participation where media forms part of people's lives and rituals but actual participation with media content remains limited (Carpentier 2007). Maximalist participation involves non-professionals participating in the production of media content, or in a media organisation's decision making processes (Carpentier 2011). The BBC WS's use of social media to interact with audiences and their vision to foster a global

conversation can be seen as an attempt to achieve more maximalist forms of participation. However, social media journalism can still take minimalist forms since the media professionals are often in the position to be able to decide who can contribute and in what ways (Carpentier 2011).

Previous research has shown that professional journalists have been slow to adapt fully to new participatory opportunities (Domingo et al., 2008; Hermida and Thurman, 2008; Ornebring, 2008; Pantti and Bakker, 2009; Singer, 2005, 2006; Singer and Ashman, 2009; Thurman, 2008). Previous studies conducted through interviews and ethnographic observation at the BBC suggest that before social media, participatory journalism on online forums hosted on BBC sites did not significantly alter the news agenda or its traditional news frames (Harris 2009; Herbert and Ali forthcoming; Herbert and Black 2009). The only academic study carried out on BBC Africa's Have Your Say (AHYS) online forum before it was closed down in 2013 demonstrates that the discussions which took place only allowed audiences to interact with pre-set, traditional news frames of Africa (Ogunyemi 2011). In addition, several studies of BBC Have Your Say online forums<sup>15</sup> argue that the way the BBC carries out its strict moderation hinders any real participation to take place (Gillespie, et al 2010; Herbert and Ali forthcoming; Herbert and Black 2009).

One explanation is that handing over control to audiences threatens one of the well-established and fundamental roles of the journalistic profession, namely that of being a gatekeeper (Singer 2006, Jönsson and Örnebring 2010). Gatekeeping is defined as:

'...the process by which selections are made in media work, especially decisions about whether or not to admit a particular news story to pass through the "gates" of a news medium into the news channels' (McQuail 1994: 213).

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<sup>15</sup> These online have your say forums are no longer hosted on BBC WS websites, with audience interactivity taking place on social media instead.

Carpentier express the unequal power relation between producers and audiences below.

'Media professionals retain strong control over process and outcome restricting participation to access and interaction, to the degree that one wonder whether the concept of participation is still appropriate' (Carpentier 2011: 69).

The gatekeeper role is preserved by practices and values that are thought to guarantee quality, balance and impartiality in news reporting (Reese and Ballinger 2001).

Journalists losing control of the gathering, processing and publishing of news, might mean a decrease in the status of the journalistic profession, or at least journalists worry that it does (Deuze, 2005; Lowrey and Anderson, 2005; Matheson, 2004; Singer, 2003). Other key journalistic processes include selecting, filtering and editing content (Domingo, Quandt et al. 2008, Bakker and Pantti 2009). Participatory journalism is often seen as challenging traditional media's monopoly of those practices. In response to participatory journalism, some scholars have suggested that journalism is moving from gatekeeping to gate watching (Bruns 2003), a more maximalist approach involving less filtering, where rather than journalists controlling the news flow, the discussion between audiences and producers online actually becomes the news (Bruns 2003, Singer 2004).

More recent studies of participatory news environments have concluded that it is now no longer possible to distinguish social media news from traditional mass media news as they impact on each other, forming a new category referred to as hybrid news (Hermida 2010, Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012). For example, journalists use Twitter, Facebook and blogs to find inspiration for news stories which make it into traditional news coverage, while journalists publish their news directly onto social media platforms, thus circumventing traditional news outlets. Hermida (2013) argues that the boundaries of journalism as a cultural field of production can be questioned when



actions which are usually exclusive to a profession can be performed by non-professionals. Journalism is also decreasingly a final product published to the audience as a definitive version of events. Thus, despite there being plenty of evidence that journalists are still holding onto their gatekeeping functions thus limiting participation, news environments such as Facebook and Twitter can open up journalism and allow more non-professional voices to be heard (Singer 2005, Lasorsa, Lewis et al. 2012).

Hybrid news I argue fit into more maximalist definitions of participation. However, the distribution of power between different actors on social media whether that being professional journalists, elite individuals with advanced social media skills or really citizens from around Africa still bear the question, who is empowered and granted the opportunity and, the power to speak within these environments? In addition, the difference with hybrid news co-constructed by an online collectivism, is that it breaks with the longstanding journalistic values of objectivity and impartiality with has got implications for the democratic value of journalism (Hermida 2013). The question therefore is whether these new forms of hybrid production and participation lead to more democratic forms of journalism than what came before? Section 2.4 now reviews deliberative democracy literature in order to provide a framework for how to judge whether or not journalism is becoming more democratic.

## **2.4 Democratic debate and the inclusion of difference**

### **2.4.1 Deliberative democracy and communicative rationality**

As discussed previously, participatory journalism is theoretically linked to the ideals of deliberative democracy. At the centre of deliberative democracy lies the concept of the public sphere, developed by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. His public sphere theory is the most elaborative theory developed to date to describe the workings of deliberation, media and politics (Dahlgren 2009). In Habermas's early writing,

deliberation was seen as taking place when people could come together to deliberate in an open 'public sphere' (Habermas 1989). This ideal public sphere has been compared to public debates in coffee shops in 18th century Europe or the marketplaces of ancient Greece. According to Habermas (1989), a 'public sphere' is a space where matters of public concern can be discussed and outcomes are based on the quality of the argument, according to his 'communicative rationality' framework (Dahlberg 2004:13). Habermas's (1991) criteria for communicative rationality are quoted below (Dahlberg 2001:622-623):

**1. *Exchange and critique of reasoned moral-practical validity claims.***

Deliberation involves engaging in reciprocal critique of normative positions that are backed up by reasons rather than simply being asserted.

**2. *Reflexivity.*** Participants must critically examine their cultural values, assumptions and interests, as well as the larger social context.

**3. *Ideal role taking.*** Participants must attempt to understand the argument from the other's perspective. This requires a commitment to an ongoing dialogue with difference, in which interlocutors listen to each other respectfully.

**4. *Sincerity.*** Each participant must make a sincere effort to provide all information relevant to the particular problem under consideration, including information regarding intentions, interests, needs, and desires.

**5. *Discursive inclusion and equality.*** Every participant affected by the validity claims under consideration is equally entitled to introduce and question any assertion whatsoever. Inclusion can be limited by

inequalities from outside the discourse – by formal or informal restrictions to access. It can also be limited by inequalities within the discourse, where some dominate discourse and others struggle for their voices to be heard.

**6. *Autonomy from state and economic power.*** Discourse must be driven by the concerns of publicly oriented citizens rather than by money or administrative power.

I will argue that some of the ideals of Habermas's communicative rationality, even if not always achievable in a mediated public debate, have elements that, despite criticism, are important for assessing the quality of democratic debate in communicative spaces.

For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to first point out that when Habermas refers to the public sphere he does not refer to one specific homogeneous public, at least not in the later versions of his theory (1996). Instead, he moves away from a position of describing one unified public sphere towards describing it as 'a network for communicating information and points of view' (Habermas 1996:360), allowing the inclusion of overlapping national and international cultural and sub cultural arenas (Gitlin 1998, Cunningham 2001). The different participatory platforms and social media networks that constitute participatory journalism at the BBC African services can thus be analysed as a number of 'sphericules', or public spaces, rather than being assessed as part of a unified African public sphere.

In Habermas's later work, his theoretical standpoint shifts from including only public debates in open face-to-face fora in the concept of a deliberative system to encompassing mass media and journalism (Mansbridge 1999, Hendriks 2006, Parkinson 2006, Gastil and Black 2008, Dryzek 2009). Contrary to earlier public sphere theory, where journalism was seen as unable to provide democratic deliberation unless

it led to specific political action (Habermas 1989, McCoy and Scully 2002, Bohman 2004), news reporting is now seen as part of a deliberative system aimed at engaging citizens in public debate (Romano 2010). However, critics argue that it is difficult to achieve an ideal speech situation, as both speaking and listening are required for this, and journalists rarely listen to their audiences (Boswell 2013). Instead, the news media often provide a monologic relationship between elites and their audiences (Chambers 2009). However, in recent years, the interactive nature of the internet has been viewed as a way of approaching an ideal speech situation between elites and audiences and thus facilitating a public sphere (Dahlberg 2001, Gimmmler 2001, Sunstein 2001, Stromer-Galley 2003, Dahlgren 2005). Public sphere theory, however, is seen by some as disguising control and power because, in line with the Western liberal tradition, it favours a particular type of elitist reasoning, which in turn marginalises cultural diversity (Fraser 1992, Downey and Fenton 2003, Cottle 2006, Mouffe 1992) and alienates women (Fraser 1990).

#### **2.4.2 Aesthetic-affective modes of communication – a critique of communicative rationality**

A very important criticism of communicative rationality expressed by Young (1989) is that a focus on rational deliberation suppresses aesthetic affective forms of expression in favour of a more distant rational way of debating. Barber (1987) argues that 'songs, jokes, and anecdotes' are the main ways in which people whose voices are denied representation in mainstream media express themselves,<sup>16</sup> a point also made by Mano (2007). This debate relates back to my previous discussion about small media and alternative communicative spaces in Africa.

Difference democrats convincingly argue that we must embrace the aesthetic-affective modes of communication in order to advance democratic culture. They also argue that

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<sup>16</sup> See the discussion of small media in Africa earlier in this chapter.

such modes of discourse are not taken into account in Habermas' conception of communicative rationality, which ends up marginalizing certain voices and limiting understanding (Dahlberg 2005).

Excluding aesthetics, affective communication results in the marginalisation of those who express themselves in this way and limits understanding of their issues (Dahlberg 2005; Young 1989). In order to illustrate the point about the importance of aesthetic affective modes of communication in democratic debate, I will outline two forms of expression that I argue are a crucial part of public sphere deliberation: storytelling and rhetoric.

Storytelling is 'a relational form of deliberation in which participants appeal to common values and experiences through telling stories' (Ryfe 2006:72-93). For example, storytelling has helped to address the issue of the civil rights movement in America as well as helping to bring sexual harassment onto the public agenda in the 1970s and 1980s (Young and Press 2000). In these instances, storytelling facilitated communicative rationality through: a) making otherwise unrecognised issues known, with the experience of sexual harassment being told by women themselves; b) by allowing personal accounts (of the civil rights movement) from marginalised voices to be heard; and c) through creating a shared language for airing previously unnamed injustices (Dahlberg 2005). There are also examples of how participatory journalism at the BBC WS has enabled voices from similarly marginalised groups, such as rape victims in Darfur, to be heard via Africa Have Your Say (AHYS) (Ogunyemi 2011). Making space for storytelling in deliberation can thus be essential if the voices of local, diasporic or counter publics are to be heard in larger more connected public spheres. Another important form of communication for opening up public debate is rhetoric.

*Rhetoric* often includes expressions such as signs, banners, dance, songs, graffiti, jokes, cyber parody, poetry etc. Rhetoric can be understood as persuasion, and it is

therefore often seen as a threat to rational debate (Dahlberg 2005). However, it can also be used to emphasise a point and help give a voice to those who are not usually heard. Through my fieldwork it has become clear that 'Hausa sayings' are a very popular form of rhetoric used on BBC Hausa social media forums to mediate between urban, rural, inter-generational and diaspora identifications and belongings. Therefore, it can be argued that the use of Hausa sayings in debates will increase understanding and inclusion in democratic communication. However, not all forms of rhetoric should be included in the concept of democratic debate, as coercive forms of discourse such as 'propaganda, deception, strategizing, dogmatic ranting, and emotional blackmailing' could all lead to alienation and exclusion (Dahlberg 2005:120). Hence, different forms of expression and points of views should not be excluded from debates. Rather, what should be removed is coercive force and domination.

Previous research has shown that social media contributes to changing news values. Papacharissi and Oliveira (2012) use the term 'affective news' to describe the social media content that circulated during the political crisis in Egypt in 2011, consisting of gossip and plenty of opinion mixed with some fact. According to these authors, 'Tweets blended emotion with opinion, and drama with fact, reflecting deeply subjective accounts and interpretations of events, as they unfolded' (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 277). They therefore argue that we should not just assume that social media discussions are necessarily in line with an idealised version of democratic debate, but rather new news values need to be accepted and included in public debate, as discussed earlier.

### **2.4.3 Power dynamics and a critique of consensus building within public spheres**

The second criticism of Habermas's criteria is the argument that communicative rationality treats power in a naïve way. For participants to be able to take part in

deliberation on equal terms as Habermas suggests, power would need to be transparent so it could be identified and addressed. However, power as the result of social inequality can never really be separated from the public sphere (Fraser 1990, Young and Press 2000). For example, in terms of participatory journalism at the BBC African services, journalists have the power to decide what is included or excluded from participation, thus there is a clear power asymmetry between producers and consumers. However, Benhabib (1989) and Burbules (1993) argue that respect and reciprocity are more important than equality and power for democratic debate, implying that differences in power in debates do not mean that the public sphere cannot be democratic. As long as all parties in a debate, more or less powerful, respect and listen to each other, as well as taking turns to speak, more dialogue will result.

Habermas's idea of reaching a consensus has also been seen to limit inclusion in debates, as consensus is seen as oppressing those who have a different point of view (Dahlberg 2005). Mouffe (1992), questions Habermas's notion that the goal of deliberation is to reach a consensus in which participants put their differences aside. She argues instead that participants from different communities who have different interests are more likely to agree due to power politics rather than because of any real consensus. Mouffe claims that antagonism is a permanent part of democracy, and therefore she does not think that agreement is possible or indeed desirable in a pluralist society (Mouffe 2009).

Mouffe argues that in a society which promotes pluralist liberal democratic politics, antagonisms are integral to politics. According to Mouffe, pluralism refers to society as an open discursive field where multiple social identities can co-exist and sometimes clash. In order to describe the power relations that exist in society, Mouffe makes a distinction between politics and the political. The political is the antagonistic dimension of society that is always there because identity is only constructed as difference, by

identifying an 'us' and therefore a 'them'. This does not mean that all social relations are antagonistic, but they can become so 'when 'the others' start to be perceived as putting into question our identity and threatening our existence' (Mouffe 2009: 550). Politics, on the other hand, refers to the practices, institutions and discourses that try to create an order for society; this practice is always potentially antagonistic because the political dimension affects politics. Therefore, a failure to reach consensus in politics is not negative because it is a permanent part of pluralist democracy. Conflict is consequently part of society, not something that can be removed through dialogue (Mouffe 2009), and it is therefore impossible to leave antagonisms out of deliberative democracy as Habermas suggests (Kapoor 2008a). Just as politics should permit difference, so should journalism allow different stories from different perspectives to be told (Young 1989). In Young's version of communicative democracy, everybody comes from different standpoints, but the media help by making difference public and therefore allowing more than one view to be represented. Without media, people would be more inclined to act selfishly. When the interests of different groups are made public it becomes more difficult to act only in one's own interest.

Habermas argues that communicative rationality is where participants smooth out their differences through deliberation and the force of best reason (Habermas 1984). The debate between the democratic theories of Habermas and Mouffe can be seen as a proxy for modern and postmodern debates, with Habermas representing the former by defending reason, legitimacy and justice, whilst (Mouffe 1999) argues instead for pluralism, antagonism and contingency in line with postmodern philosophy. However, Mouffe's (1992) critique of Habermas's notion of consensus building can be viewed as a misinterpretation of communicative rationality, which argues that in order to be called democratic, discourse should involve respectful listening and inclusion of different points of view. In addition, consensus is an idealisation that will never be fully realised; it is a process not an end in itself. It is the process of deliberation that brings a stronger



civil society, and there is no expectation that everybody who takes part in a debate should eventually agree. Rather, in practice public opinion is always in the process of formation (Dahlberg 2005), and if consensus emerges it is gradual, fragmented and partial. As discussed earlier, democracy building and public debate usually take place within nation states, but it is important to understand these concepts in an international environment, especially when critically assessing the democratic value of a global conversation.

#### **2.4.4 International public debate between the Global North and the Global South**

Habermas's theory points towards the need for more civic participation in deliberation about international issues such as international development, international rules and laws and investments by multinational corporations (Kapoor 2008). Habermas favours a decentralised view of power, thus he is not in favour of the ideals of democracy being imposed on the Global South. Instead, his theory of deliberative democracy promotes participation across North-South divides and between powerful and non-powerful participants. In this view, the BBC African services' participatory programmes about transnational and Pan-African issues might be seen as promoting dialogue and creating spaces where different interest groups can debate the most important issues at stake.

However, is it possible to conduct a democratic debate when there is great inequality in the economic and material conditions of the participants, as is the case with the Global North and the Global South? In the following section I refer to Kapoor's (2008a) comparison between Habermas and Mouffe's standpoints in relation to an international democratic discourse. Kapoor puts the two thinker's arguments into dialogue contrasting their standpoints on international dialogue even though they themselves did not particularly articulate their thoughts in relation to each other's theory; therefore I refer to Kapoor's (2008a) interpretation rather than the original sources.

Habermas acknowledges that the socio-economic statuses of participants need to be fairly equal for deliberative democracy to work. Thus, in order for more voices to be heard, inequality needs to be identified and rectified as far as possible (Kapoor 2008a). On the other hand, Mouffe does not believe that inequalities can be smoothed out so easily, and in her view attention would need to be paid to the tendency of the global public sphere to exclude pluralism due to the power of elite nations and individuals (Kapoor 2008a). Instead, there might need to be several interconnected spheres in order to cater for different conversations. Inspired by Mouffe, Escobar (2011) agrees that if Western agendas are too prescriptive they will dominate. In order to foster democratic debate through participatory journalism it is important to understand whether it is possible to allow different voices and stories to be heard, irrespective of privilege and status.

Mouffe's pluralist idea of multiple public spheres which permit many views to exist in tandem would imply that international development agencies, and perhaps also international broadcasters, should be able to cater for different audiences in different conversations simultaneously, linking the spheres when necessary (Kapoor 2008a). In a way this is precisely what the BBC WS global conversation sets out to do. The BBC African services try to engage in a global conversation by using participatory journalism, thus contributing to a global public sphere. However, what power dynamics are masked in these conversations? Even if African audiences talk back to the BBC, are BBC journalists able to hear what they are saying? In order to understand whether it is possible for BBC WS producers to listen to their audiences in Africa, I am using Spivak's theories of representing 'the Third World Other', detailed in her essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (Spivak 1988) and a summary of her theory, in Kapoor's (2008b).

The term 'Subaltern' in Subaltern studies draws on Gramsci's writings about hegemony and refers to subordination in terms of 'class, caste, gender, race, language, and culture and was used to highlight the importance of dominant and dominated relationships in history' (Prakash, Mallon et al. 1994: 1477). Founded in the 1980s, subaltern studies have been used to critique domination in various forms, for example India's dominant nationalist voices or European domination in Latin America. Subaltern studies themselves have also been criticised for ignoring gender inequalities or failing to take account of class or caste. Nevertheless, I find subaltern studies, particularly Spivak's writing, useful for critiquing how the BBC African services represent their audiences' interests.

In development practice, organisations from the Global North often set out to represent the interests of subaltern subjects, but instead of representing them they still end up speaking for them (Kapoor 2008b). In such circumstances, superiority is often taken as the norm, and calling subjects 'target groups' and 'beneficiaries' rather than characterising them as 'disadvantaged' does not change this dynamic. It is thus not possible to approach the Global South as a level playing field where deliberation will smooth out any differences and subjects are able to agree on what is justice for all in the vein of Habermas, as interactions are always loaded with the baggage of imperialism and Western domination (Spivak 1988). In addition, Spivak argues that hegemonic discourses in the West are deaf even when subaltern subjects do speak, if they do not express themselves in the expected way (Kapoor 2008b). According to this view, trying to improve the lives of less privileged groups, such as those who are deemed information poor in the case of the BBC African services, still reinforces racist and imperialistic views (Spivak 1988).

When journalists from the Global North meet the Global South 'Other', it is important that they acknowledge their own baggage and ask questions about who represents who

and why (Spivak 1988, Kapoor 2008b). We can never get rid of our biases, so it is necessary instead to acknowledge that we are situated within a discourse, a culture, institutions, colonial history and geopolitics of which we are therefore part, whilst at the same time also critiquing our position (Spivak 1988). Spivak also argues that it is necessary to decolonise one's learning in order to speak the same language as the subaltern. However, there are limits to this approach, and Spivak has in mind a one-on-one dialogue and exploration which is difficult to achieve on a scale as large as that of the case of participatory journalism. Contrary to dialogue, journalistic practices in the Global North usually follow strong traditions of objectivity. The following section addresses dialogue and mutuality in relation to journalistic practices.

## **2.5 Dialogue and the tradition of objectivity in journalistic practices**

### **2.5.1 Dialogic deliberation as a guide for public debate**

Does dialogue actually work when it comes to mediated forms of communication?

Research on German international broadcaster Deutsche Welle's strategy for engaging with the Arab world in a dialogic way opens up questions about how German public diplomacy broadcasts approach their audiences: does Deutsche Welle talk *about*, talk *at* or indeed talk *with* its listeners (Lucassen and Zöllner, 2004), or alternatively, does the station employ dialogues *in front of* its audience? In order to theorise the dialogic dimension of participatory journalism I turn to the theories of Martin Buber (Buber 2002, 2004), literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) and educator Paulo Freire (2000). The following sections will outline Habermas's, Bakhtin's, Buber's and Freire's theories of dialogue and their importance for more dialogic forms of journalism.

According to Buber, genuine dialogue can only happen when participants turn to each other with a genuine intention to establish a special kind of meeting where they understand each other, even if only for a brief moment, an attitude which Buber called

mutuality. A technical dialogue, on the other hand, is when dialogue is used as means of establishing an objective understanding of the other, as is so often the case in news coverage (Buber 2002/1994). Buber (2002) also defines two kinds of relationships, the first of which, the I-It relationship, is when a person reaches out and treats another person as an object to be known and used. The second type, I-Thou, is a state of mutual recognition where an exchange takes place between two people who accept each other's uniqueness. I-Thou relationships are dialogic and, as Buber puts it:

whether spoken or silent...each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them (Buber 1965:19).

Fostering dialogue can be just a pre-set public diplomacy and public relations communication strategy. Thus, participatory journalism which tries to encourage dialogue and portray certain of a country's values can be seen as a pre-set communications strategy of dialogue and therefore as not seeking mutuality (Zöllner 2006). Bakhtin recognises that there are texts with a single viewpoint, a monologic voice that sees the world as an object of deduction, which he likens to the modern scientific model (Bakhtin 1981, Hirschkop 1999). If promoting dialogue or conversation is a strategy, as with the global conversation, this might run the risk of making the relationship an I-It relationship in Buber's scheme.

Along with Buber and Habermas, Freire is interested in dialogue as a special kind of meeting or process. However, unlike Habermas's theory of communicative rationality, for Freire dialogue is essentially a learning process, and exploratory learning can have no rules. Instead the meaning and methods of dialogue keep unfolding as part of the process.

According to Freire, dialogue can be a process of empowerment for the disenfranchised through a process that disrupts traditional power hierarchies (Freire 2000). Freire explains the dynamics of dialogue in the following way:

Dialogue is a way of observing, collectively, how hidden values and intentions can control our behaviour, and how unnoticed cultural differences can clash without our realizing what is occurring. It can therefore be seen as an arena in which collective learning takes place and out of which a sense of increased harmony, fellowship and creativity can arise (Freire 2000:70).

Therefore, Freire is not advocating consensus or a closure to dialogue because the dialogue is always unfolding. Freire's understanding of dialogue is useful when considering the process of participatory journalism in relation to moderation and the rules journalists lay down for interactions. An important question to consider is whether it is at all possible for mutual learning and genuine listening beyond power relations to occur through participatory journalism given all the processes and practices that come with the journalistic profession.

Whilst the points above are guides to recognising democratic debate, there are also signs that can be used to identify undemocratic debate, such as exchanges of monologues, pre-packaged arguments, dominant voices, posturing, specialised jargon, avoidance of difficult issues, tokenism, polarisation and confrontational exchange (Escobar 2011). Confrontational communication such as TV debates (Tannen 1998) can be counterproductive because it does not allow the parties to explore the issues at stake. A diversity of voices is not heard because of argumentative frames of mind around gay and lesbian issues or euthanasia, for example. However, the difference between argumentative debate and genuine dialogue is that the latter takes place within a safe space where 'participants strive towards reciprocal exploration, instead of

ritualised communication' (Escobar 2011: 15). Avoiding ritualised communication might prove hard when it comes to media where so much behaviour falls into this category.

A framework that allows these dialogic notions to be included is Escobar's (2011) concept of dialogic deliberation. Dialogic deliberation emphasises inclusion and equality in public debate, as well as giving importance to listening to and respecting 'each other's experiences and perspectives' (Escobar 2011). This is referred to as the dialogic turn in deliberation, as explained below by Escobar (2011).

The concept emphasises inclusion and equality, gives prominence to quality listening, and asks participants to value each other's experiences and perspectives. In sum, many scholars and practitioners are paying increasing attention to the relational dimensions of deliberative processes. This can be seen as a dialogic turn in public deliberation theory and practice (Escobar 2011:38).

Such an approach will contribute to moving discussions of deliberative democracy away from rationality and consensus as the goals for debate and allow the inclusion of different forms of knowledge and different ways of speaking. A dialogic approach to debates could mean that participatory journalism may allow audiences to produce their own stories and narratives in the future and contribute to debates that are more relevant to local audiences in Africa and among its diaspora.

At least in principle, participatory journalism is a move to foster dialogue between producers and audiences, a 'global conversation' in the BBC's own words (BBCWS 2013:4). A dialogic approach can contribute to a more democratic conversation by permitting different types of communication, such as storytelling, testimony and other styles of expression, passionate or confessional for example (Innes & Booher 2003). Is dialogic communication possible in mediatised contexts? When people participate in

the media limelight it is often more about performing than talking. Dialogue, however, is contrary to a long-standing tradition of ontological and empirical objectivity in journalism.

### **2.5.2 Journalistic cultures of objectivity and a potential dialogic turn**

The ontology behind objectivity is that there is one objective reality which the journalist can observe and portray in a true sense. Objective journalism, contrary to dialogue, encourages the journalist to take on the role of a professional expert, a role that does not interfere with his or her own values and personality (Soffer 2009). This expert persona allows the journalist to adopt the voice of one who knows the truth and reports on it. In this sense, journalistic objectivity is similar to Bakhtin's theory of monologism and Buber's I-It relationship. According to Bakhtin, the monologic text fails to recognise that the viewpoints of others can be as valid and legitimate as those of the I (Bakhtin, 1994). A monologic perception is similar to Buber's I-It relationship in that it 'sees the world as an object of deduction and represents it as voiceless' (McIntire 2005:32). Buber's I-Thou relationship is a way of interpreting the world in a dialogic way, permitting subjectivity, with no aims, purpose or needs. On the other hand, the I-It relationship is a failure of the dialogic ideal; the 'It', in I-It relationships can be observed, measured and quantified for the I's own purposes (Cooper 2003). Like I-It, journalistic objectivity is characterised by: 'truthfulness, relevance, balance, impartiality, non-distortion, neutrality, testability, informativeness, fairness, depersonalisation, scepticism and factuality' (Ognianova and Endersby 1996:10).

These values of objectivity do not necessarily imply a belief that there is only one truth, which journalists describe. Objective empiricism is about carrying out journalistic practices in line with an objective culture, for example by relying on official sources like official records, publications or broadcasts, government officials etc. Journalists use official sources rather than personal accounts because, according to the objective culture, they provide better-verified facts (Soffer 2009). However, relying on official



sources limits the range of opinions presented in the news (Schudson 2005), restricts social dialogue and promotes one monological voice (Soffer 2009). Hence, in order to provide more dialogic forms of news reporting, journalists will have to change their news reporting processes as well as their culture. Journalists at the BBC World Service no longer claim to be objective, but they use a culture of objectivity in their discourse and work practices. As director of the BBC World Service, Peter Horrocks argued that the BBC's impartial journalism was the cornerstone of the organisation's news output (Horrocks 2011). Impartiality is part of the culture of objectivity, which therefore prevents dialogic relationships. However, the culture of objectivity is changing all the time, and participatory journalism plays a part in how empirical objectivity is practiced.

In the 1980s, news broadcasting saw a turn away from objectivity and towards a dialogic form of presenting news in the form of the public journalism movement, as evidenced by the 'radio call-in' trend (Katriel 2004; Soffer 2009). The BBC World Service did not have its own call-in programme until 2005, while 'Africa Have Your Say' started in 2006. As early as the 1960s, and in broadcast TV and radio in particular, a 'new journalism' movement started to emphasise journalists 'getting inside' the story (Fishwick 1975). 'New Journalism' aimed to present the subjectivity of both the journalist and the object, an approach which reflects a polyphonic text similar to Bakhtin's ideas (Soffer 2009:482). Later, as mentioned earlier, public journalism called for journalists to address their readers as participants rather than passive audiences (Rosen 1996). Leaving objectivity behind means moving towards a dialogic approach to journalism, where many subjective voices can be heard. Participatory journalism moves a step forward from public journalism because it actually allows audiences to participate in the production of news through interactive tools such as Facebook and Twitter. Participatory journalism is thus seen as a way of widening the news beyond official sources and engaging in conversation and collaboration with the audience. The question of whether journalists are able to combine this approach with the longstanding

culture of balance and impartiality in which they are still immersed will be dealt with in the empirical chapters. Now follow some concluding remarks about journalism and mediated democratic debate.

## **2.6 Summary**

The key issue this thesis attempts to address is whether participatory journalism has implications for the inclusion of people in Africa and its diaspora in international mediated democratic debate. Previous literature on this subject has given examples of how citizen journalism provides a parallel news space in Africa, allowing a more diverse set of voices to be heard (Moyo 2009, Mpofu 2011, Poell and Borra 2012). However, few studies have so far looked into how social media influences international news reporting, the blurred boundaries between producers and audiences or indeed what the implications are for democratic debate. I will attempt to shed more light on how participatory initiatives alter the practices of producers and audiences and what the implications are for democratic debate in chapter 5, where I analyse three mediated moments of participatory journalism at the BBC African services.

This research tries to fill a gap by looking at the relationships between mediated participation, new and old journalistic practices and public debate at the BBC African services. Previous literature claims that participatory journalism is more democratic than the traditional variety (Domingo, Quandt et al. 2008, Hermida 2011) but fails to provide detailed insight into how participatory journalism contributes to the furthering of democratic deliberation. In order to make claims about the democratic nature of participatory journalism it is necessary to understand what constitutes the nature and quality of democratic debate.

A few important aspects of democratic debate for participatory journalism have been identified in this chapter: a) the exchange of reason can include storytelling and

personal narratives; b) arguments can be based on different forms of knowledge; c) debate should be based on reciprocity, respect and ideal role taking; d) participants (both producers and participating audiences) should use self-reflection and mutual exploration to consider the most important values at stake; and e) debates should foster inclusion and equality, giving prominence to listening. These aspects of democratic debate take into consideration criticism of Habermas's theory of communicative rationality which support a more pluralist view of the public sphere (Fraser 1992, Downey and Fenton 2003, Cottle 2006, Mouffe 1992). I argue that communicative rationality is lacking in the following areas: a) it does not include aesthetic affective modes of communication (Young and Press 2000); b) it fails to acknowledge that power cannot be separated from discourse (Fraser 1990); and c) it promotes consensus as the main objective of deliberation (Mouffe 1999). I argue for a broader, more inclusive, non-consensus-driven approach to deliberation than that provided by strict interpretations of communicative rationality. I also see media, social media, small media and public discourse as part of a deliberative system which I study through three mediated moments, which will be outlined in chapter 3.

In order to establish a more inclusive and relational approach to democratic debate, I have incorporated dialogue theory within my theoretical framework, as demonstrated here. First of all it is important to recognise that all human communication is dialogic, as the meaning of language draws on what has been said before, while the understanding of language exists in relation to many disparate voices (Bakhtin 1981). However, apart from the dialogic nature of language, the dialogue theory of scholars such as (Buber 1965) and (Freire 2000) establishes dialogue as a special kind of meeting, a relationship that permits mutual recognition and respect. The opposite of this is monologue disguised as dialogue, where the speaking party is not interested in what the other has to say. Accordingly, the evaluative framework for recognising democratic debate at the BBC World Service builds upon both Habermas's framework of

communicative rationality and dialogue theory as incorporated into Escobar's (2009 and 2011) dialogic deliberation framework. Chapter 6 assesses the democratic qualities of the social media texts I analysed during my time at the BBC African services in order to judge, according to the criteria outlined here, whether participation leads to more mutual dialogue in international debate.

Habermas did not really formulate his theory of communicative rationality with the politics of the Global South in mind. However, when trying to understand the international broadcasting and public diplomacy that the UK aims at Sub-Saharan Africa it is important to understand how Habermas's democratic theory extends to transnational relations. When there are great inequalities between the economic and material conditions of participants, not to mention technological disparities, it is important to make sure that the global conversation is not just manipulated by global elites (Mouffe 2009). In addition, when marginalised groups in Africa are able to speak, it is important to make sure that the producers of participatory programmes are able to listen, even to views which might not be expressed in the expected way or format. For this to happen, Spivak (1988) argues that it is important for producers to acknowledge their own baggage and situation within colonial history, institutions, discourse and geopolitics. Regarding global relations, it is important that BBC journalists reflect on who they are representing and why. In chapter 5, I explore this through observation and interviews with producers at the BBC African services, analysing and discussing their reflectivity.

I conclude here that the past decade has seen public diplomacy, and therefore international broadcasting, move towards a more dialogic approach to engaging with foreign publics (Zöllner 2006). This has involved diplomatic agents such as international broadcasters setting the objective of engaging in dialogue in order to achieve public diplomacy goals. Promoting dialogue as part of an organisation's mission might mean

that dialogue is just an example of 'monologue disguised as a dialogue' (Buber 2002/1994: 22). Not only does this instrumental form of dialogue turn away from Habermas's idea of communicative rationality, it is also an example of Buber's idea of false dialogue, or I-it relationships, where the other person is treated as an object of deduction, in contrast to an I-thou relationship, where mutuality takes place (Buber 2002). By critically assessing the notion of the global conversation, discussed in chapter 4, I try to understand whether such a conversation leads to a more dialogic approach to international broadcasting.

Another obstacle to achieving democratic dialogue through participatory journalism identified in this literature review is that not all forms of participation encourage democratic practice (Carpentier 2011 Singer 2014). Some participatory initiatives are just tokenistic and the professional journalists are actually not prepared to allow the audience to have any real input when it comes to gathering, processing and publishing news. However, on social media professional journalists are no longer able to act as gatekeepers because they are not in control of what content gets published, therefore Twitter and Facebook have been described as hybrid spaces where news and deliberation exist as a more dialogic space (Hermida 2010). My study attempts to fill a research gap by understanding the relationship between journalistic practices and mediated democratic debate, not just on social media or on news organisations' own platforms, but within the blurred boundaries between them. In Chapter 5 I provide findings from interviews with journalists who produce participatory journalism at the BBC African services and analyse how practices are changing as a result of social media.

In Chapter 3, I outline why and how I have researched participatory journalism based on the conclusions drawn here that democratic debate needs to be assessed both by looking at participatory practices at the BBC African services and by analysing the texts

produced by social media initiatives. I have therefore opted for an integrated methodology which uses both qualitative and quantitative data gathered during my time at the BBC WS, where I studied production, audiences and social media texts, as described in the next chapter.

# Chapter 3 — Methodology: Participatory Observation of Participatory Journalism

## 3.1 Introduction

In the 1990s, newsroom ethnographies were usually based on extensive periods of observation and interviews in newsrooms (See, Tuchman 1991, Fishman 1997, Hansen, Cottle et al. 1998, Cottle 2007). My research approach sets itself apart from these studies by combining newsroom ethnography with online observation and social media analysis. As a result, this study consists of participant observation of participatory journalism both offline in the newsroom of the BBC African services and online on social media platforms. In addition, most media research studies production, audiences and text separately. In the case of participatory journalism these three stages are merged into one, taking place at one time, meaning that new integrated research methods are required. Consequently, it has been necessary to develop an integrated methodology that allows me to study participatory practices as they take place at the point where both producers and audience produce media texts together online. In addition, my approach is integrated in the sense that, despite its ethnographic and largely qualitative nature, it combines qualitative and quantitative data.

The majority of ethnographies used to be conducted 'in the field', in the anthropological sense of an extended time period in one place. Much more ethnographic work is now done in different places, including online or in the blurred spaces between online and offline (Hine 2005, Murthy 2008). This thesis studies three 'mediated moments', using Bird's (2010: 85) approach, which researches such moments from a multitude of sites rather than from one defined field. Although Bird applied this approach to media

audiences alone, I have adapted her method, turning it into a tool that can be used to understand the integration of production, social media texts and audience practices as they happen on social media. The advantage of using mediated moments as an entry point is the ability to focus on how producers and participatory audiences come together, as well as on what they do together in relation to a specific news event. The mediated moments studied are:

1. *The Nigerian Election Crowdfmap* in April 2011;
2. *BBC Africa Debate*, a participatory debate programme launched in March-June 2012, currently still being produced by the BBC WS; and
3. *Love African Football*, the BBC's coverage of the Africa Cup of Nations in January-February 2013.

This chapter discusses the *principles*, *practices* and *challenges* of carrying out offline and online participant observation at the BBC African services and is structured in the following way.

Section 3.2 – Principles – outlines the overall methodology: an integrated participant observation of the producers, users and text of participatory journalism at the BBC African services. This part is divided into three sub-sections. Section 3.2.1 – *Participant observation and 'studying sideways'* – explains that the overarching approach taken follows a social constructivist tradition, despite the fact that newsroom studies are usually carried out within realist and objectivist traditions (Domingo 2008). I then move on to explain what is meant by 'studying sideways' (Hannerz 2002) and describe the situated knowledge needed to gain access to the research setting.

Section 3.2.2 – Integrated mediated moments – explains the integration of participant observation of producers, users and text across online (producers and audiences) and offline locations (producers only). Studying journalism both online and offline makes it



possible to understand the product of participatory journalism: the text as well as its organisational setting. If I had used a virtual methodology only, the social and historical context at the BBC WS of social media journalism would not have been captured.

Section 3.2.3 – Qualitative and quantitative research – outlines and discusses how this study has combined quantitative methods involving social media analytics with qualitative methods like observation, interviews and participation. The integration of both types of approach distinguishes this study from traditional media ethnographies.

Section 3.3 – Practices – covers the research design and the rationale and background for choosing the three mediated moments at the BBC African services. The first mediated moment, *Facilitating personal experiences of voting in the 2011 Nigerian election*, was chosen in order to be able to study the blurred boundaries between producers and audiences and determine whether citizen reporting allows Nigerian citizens' personal stories of voting to be heard and represented on the Ushahidi crowdmap. The second mediated moment, *BBC Africa – an audience-led debate*, focuses on a regular radio debate programme and asks if it is really audience-led, as stated in its objectives, and whether audience participation fulfils the criteria of democratic debate. The final mediated moment, *Africa Cup of Nations – football fandom and political debate*, demonstrates that debates about football create a forum for a public debate that goes beyond football results to include loyalty, global politics and governance.

Section 3.4 – Analysis – describes how I went about analysing the data from both my qualitative and quantitative research stages. The qualitative data from my participant observation was captured using field notes. My field notes were transferred from hard copy note books to a google doc at the end of each field day. The google doc was used for spotting patterns and coding my observations into themes. The quantitative data was gathered using analytics systems and the exported to excel spreadsheets. The

spreadsheet was used to sort and analyse the data both quantitatively (numbers) and qualitatively (analysing the text verbatim from Facebook, Twitter and Ushahidi). The themes emerging from the quantitative analysis were then merged with the qualitative themes in a google doc to create combined themes. My approach to analysis was both **emic** – I focused on the themes that my research participants, the journalists found important and **etic** - I used a framework of dialogic deliberation to guide my enquiry.

Section 3.5 – Challenges – outlines the research methods employed and explains how the data was collected and analysed. The limitations and ethical implications of ethnographic research – both online and offline – are examined and the main methodological issues of this research project are outlined. The ethics involved in carrying out research in the newsroom and analysis on social media platforms are dealt with in two separate sub-sections. A particular ethical consideration in carrying out research in an organisation's newsroom was to ensure that no business sensitive data was leaked as a result of my study. The main ethical consideration for both types of research was the right to anonymity and privacy, and I have made considerable efforts to protect my research participants' identities. The main ethical concern when sourcing data from social media platforms was to determine whether the data I was collecting was private or public, and so to take appropriate action to protect participants' privacy. This research was carried out at a time when there were no set guidelines for researching on social media platforms, and so this study adds to the debate about ethical standards in the field. However, before addressing ethics, it is necessary to understand the overall research approach.

## 3.2 Principles – outline of and rationale for the overall methodological approach

### 3.2.1 Participant observation and ‘studying sideways’

Similarly to Born (2004), who studied the BBC through participant observation at the end of the 1990s, I situate my research within the organisational culture of the BBC in a changing policy and funding environment. My focus is the BBC’s international news organisation, the BBC World Service, and more specifically the English language BBC African services. Although my research involved spending time with producers and journalists in the BBC African services newsroom in Bush House,<sup>17</sup> this study is not entirely a classic news production ethnography, as it integrates production and audience analysis both offline and online. This section discusses various approaches to researching newsrooms and outlines how this study compares with previous studies.

Early studies of journalistic practices, usually referred to as sociology of journalism, were traditionally carried out through ethnography of production; for example, Tuchman’s *Making News* (1973) and Gans’s *Deciding What’s News* (1979) amongst others (Tuchman 1991, Fishman 1997, Hansen, Cottle et al. 1998, Cottle 2007). This body of work shed light on the production of news within newsrooms and was largely based on extensive periods of fieldwork within newsroom settings. The majority of these studies aimed to offer an objective account of newsrooms. In particular, Gans (1979) adopted strict ideas of empirical realism, aiming to provide a true or naturalistic account of newsroom practices undisturbed by the researcher. More recent research on journalistic practices, such as Mabweazara’s (2013:105) study of a Zimbabwean newsroom, discusses ‘the pitfalls of going native’, meaning that ‘the analytic position is abandoned in favour of identification with the journalists’. Instead, each time Mabweazara discerns a sense of ‘over-rapport’, he tries to distance himself from the

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<sup>17</sup> The headquarters of the BBC World Service 1940-2012.

journalists he has previously worked with. Similarly to Mabweazara (2013), the site of my study was my previous workplace, the BBC WS, where I was employed as a *Senior Analyst of Digital Media* between May 2006 and July 2009.

As a result of my previous role, in the eyes of the research participants I had the status not only of a PhD researcher but also that of an expert in digital and social media. Thus, I represented someone they could go to for advice about programmes and strategy, and who could be invited to meetings as part of project teams, despite my new role as a PhD student. Whilst spending time in the news room and attending meetings I presented my research findings and gave advice to the programme makers.

I was clear about my research objectives, and all research participants had to sign my consent form, but despite being open about my new status as a PhD researcher, I could not erase our familiarity or the multiple roles I played within the organisation during my fieldwork, nor did I want to distance myself from my ex colleagues. Instead, my connections helped me to gain access to production settings and understand and get closer to organisational practices. In my mind, having an insider's point of view, acting and communicating as a native, is not a threat to the validity of this study. Rather, this is necessary in order to be able to pick up and understand the verbal and non-verbal cues of the newsroom. My situated knowledge of the organisation and the BBC Africa newsroom was crucial both in gaining access and in understanding the workings of 'participatory journalism'. It could be argued that my role at the BBC WS was 'as a native' as opposed to 'going native' (Kanuha 2000:440).

My study follows the social constructivist traditions of journalism research (see: Hannerz 2002, Born 2004, Domingo 2008, Paterson and Domingo 2008). Social constructivism emphasises the importance of culture and context when studying and producing knowledge about a social phenomenon (McMahon 1997). According to this approach, reality is constructed through human interaction and therefore cannot be discovered

independently of its social and cultural context (Kukla 2000). Therefore, the data I collected at the BBC African services is unique to the circumstances in which I collected it. According to social constructivists, reality does not exist outside human interaction, and knowledge about the social world is a human product which is socially and culturally constructed. I argue that social media can also be studied using a social constructivist approach – or SCOT (social construction of technology) – by studying the human interactions which take place in relation to social media. I have studied interactions between producers and audiences as well as other human actors interacting with social media within the BBC WS organisation. By studying human actors interacting with technology, I have been able to understand the social construction of participatory practices. The social study of ICTs has mostly been developed within organisational studies and information systems research (Ciborra 2004, Avgerou 2010), but I draw on these theories to analyse human interaction with social media for the purpose of participatory journalism at the BBC WS. The social study of social media has enabled me not to take technology and technological progress towards democratic debate for granted. Instead I have been able to focus on what really goes on when producers and audiences use these tools and the practices that are constructed as part of participatory journalism.

In line with constructivist philosophy, I see myself as being a participant observer, meaning that I both experienced and observed my own and others' co-participation within the 'ethnographic encounter' (Tedlock 1991: 69). Thus, I argue that in part I also constructed the social phenomenon I am describing. As a co-participant, my role as a researcher became an important part of the analysis, an approach which is usually referred to as reflexivity (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). The following section explains my relationship to the other research participants and how I built reflexivity into the research design.

Reflexivity is about acting in the social world yet being able to reflect on one's own actions as objects to be studied as part of that world. As a result of taking this approach, my own role as a researcher was also part of the research focus. Thus, I do not claim to be able to give accounts of the participants' actions in the research setting, undisturbed by the researcher. Instead I recognise my participation and interference with the setting and the participants. In some cases I even exploited my participation in the setting by taking part in making participatory news and helping the journalists to strategise about how to best use social media, thus allowing my participation to become part of what I was studying. In following a reflexive approach, I was also inspired by Born (2004), whose research provides a reflexive account of studying media production at the BBC.

Born argues that reflexivity is signified by systemised self-monitoring. While this self-monitoring is part of carrying out ethnographic research, reflexivity can also be part of an organisational culture like the BBC's (Born 2002). In her study of the BBC, carried out in the 1990s, she found that the BBC itself represented a culture of reflexivity. So, in studying the organisation she was in fact also carrying out a sociology of reflexivity, of which she was herself part. She argues that 'from the early years, alongside its distributed and dialogical meta-reflexivity, the BBC on the one side, government on the other, there has existed a parallel internal sphere of professional reflection and debate' (Born 2002-68). This self-reflexive culture is also present in my study; most of my interviews represent journalists' self-reflection about which audiences they should target, what balance and impartiality mean, the ethics of journalism and the reflexivity of journalistic practices in relation to social media. My main self-monitoring and reflection as a researcher participating in this study was about ethics and my role as both a colleague and a PhD researcher.

As a participant observer, I was neither studying down (studying participants who were less powerful than me) nor studying up (studying those who were more powerful than me). In attempting to study journalistic practices amongst peers and former colleagues, I have therefore adopted Ulf Hannerz's (1998:109) concept of 'studying sideways', in which 'sideways' not only implies a relatively equal power relationship between myself and the journalists but also refers to the similarity of our tasks. I was creating stories about the journalists, who were themselves creating stories. However, although I was 'studying sideways' in terms of doing similar tasks, despite my best efforts I realised that in terms of access and power I was still 'studying upwards'. Journalists could be considered more powerful than me within the BBC WS because of their essential role in delivering the sole purpose of the organisation, the news. Of course the journalist's power is not whole or complete, but nevertheless within an organisational context they were more powerful than me. In addition, I was more dependent on their knowledge and perspective than they were on my research findings, and I was therefore indebted to them for the time they were willing to share. As a result of my different roles as a researcher and an expert, as a peer but not a journalist, I had to be reflexive about my role and my different influences on the social phenomena I was studying.

Once I had formed my research approach, perhaps the prime challenge was to design a feasible and manageable research project to study the complex ins and outs of participatory journalism at the BBC African services. In order to limit my research and make it feasible as a PhD project, I chose three discrete mediated moments as an entry point to the study of participatory journalism. The following section explains the methodology and the various methods I have applied in order to understand participatory journalism at the BBC African services.

### 3.2.2 Integrated mediated moments

The changing nature of news production and consumption means that it has become increasingly difficult to study newsmaking using only traditional ethnographic methods of observation and interviewing (Hine 2005, Cottle 2007, Paterson and Domingo 2008). Since many of these studies were carried out, the way newsrooms look has changed, as has the way news is produced (Paterson and Domingo 2008). For example, Simon Cottle and Mark Ashton's (1999) study of the BBC newsroom, *From BBC Newsroom to BBC Newscentre*, shows how new information technologies, digitalisation and convergence between media platforms, together with multi-skilling and multi-media production, have changed production. These changes make it more complicated to observe the production of online news by following the traditional ethnographic modes of 'offline' observation (Paterson and Domingo 2008).

In response to this new news environment, ethnographers interested in media production have adapted their approaches to include online methods. New methodologies include 'multimedia cyber-anthropology' (Paccagnella 1997), 'digital ethnography' (Murthy 2008), 'virtual ethnography' (Hine 2000) and 'network ethnography' (Howard 2002). There is no great difference between these approaches, and they all include online observation of production by professionals or audiences on websites, community boards, social media and other online platforms. Although most news studies take place either entirely online or solely offline, scholars of journalism increasingly favour ethnographies that combine elements of both 'physical' and 'digital' ethnography (Murthy 2008: 837, Mabweazara 2013). It seems that the emerging methodological innovations still 'benefit from the key attributes of ethnographic work including: direct and profound contact with the news workers and, in most instances, their working environment and culture' (Paterson 2008: 9). The disadvantages of relying on 'virtual methods alone' are that in doing so researchers often only have access to the



product of the journalistic work, the story, rather than the contextual social factors of the issues at stake (Murthy, 2008).

Using both online and offline methods has allowed me to approach participatory journalism from different angles and build my knowledge of participation from the perspective of producers, audiences and text by looking at the following data sources.

***Organisational Context*** – the governing framework of the BBC World Service within which participatory journalism exists, including its history, values, principles and objectives. This was captured through observation, interviews and analysis of administrative documents.

***Producers*** at the BBC African services, who plan, post and edit participatory content on social media platforms. Producers were studied through participant observation both offline and online. The Appendix contains a comprehensive list of all the in-depth interviews carried out and all regular meetings attended during my time at the BBC World Service.

***Social Media Text*** – the media text co-constructed by producers and audiences on social media platforms. The text consists of a) the content posted by BBC producers and b) the comments and responses that audiences post in response. I argue that the producer content and the audience comments together form the media text, or the participatory journalism content. The text was analysed through online observation, analytics systems and qualitative analysis of the text.

***Participatory Audiences*** – those audiences who comment and interact on BBC managed social media forums. I was not only able to track and analyse their responses to comments, but also to analyse data captured by the BBC's web analytics systems about their location, age and gender, making it possible to map these audiences' geographic and demographic characteristics quantitatively. The demographic data has

been analysed and presented quantitatively, and no individual demographic data has been used for this research.

As described above, the different elements of participatory journalism analysed here require me to use different approaches to data collection, including both qualitative and quantitative methods. The next section discusses the integration of qualitative and quantitative data.

### **3.2.3 Integrated methods - qualitative and quantitative research**

My research combines findings from both qualitative and quantitative approaches, setting it apart from most media and communications studies, which usually focus on one or the other. The ethnographic technique of participant observation used here is traditionally a purely qualitative method (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). However, although they are rare, some media ethnographies have successfully integrated quantitative data to support and add to the analysis of qualitative accounts. For example, Gillespie (1995) and Couldry and Markham (2007) both show how different types of data can be combined in order to understand media practices. Gillespie (1995) used the *Southall Youth Survey* (1989-1990) to inform data gathered in ethnographic research and further direct and deepen her ethnographic enquiry, while Couldry and Markham (2007) used a national survey to help understand qualitative data about celebrity culture and engagement with politics. I have used a similar approach in my analysis of participatory journalism and democratic debate, complementing my ethnographic work with quantitative data in order to find new themes and provide further explanations. Instead of using a sample methodology, the quantitative data used in this research has been gathered from the social media analytics systems Facebook Analytics and Sysomos (a third party transactional web data system). Before moving on to explain these systems it is necessary to expand on how I have approached the knowledge produced by social media analytics.

Contrasting with positivist approaches to research, I did not use quantitative research in an attempt to demonstrate an objective reality. Rather, similarly to Gillespie (1995), I started from the premise that it is impossible to carry out a 'neutral' pursuit of knowledge; in fact, the way in which quantitative data is collected is itself a form of reality construction (Gillespie 1995). Quantitative research methods have a closed structure for asking certain questions and collecting certain data. Analytics systems map data together according to limited categories, which limit understanding so that it covers only certain individual and collective behaviours. For example, people's ages are gathered into age brackets, while actions like clicking and commenting are grouped together under the term engagement. In this sense, not only are analytics systems shaped by the social world, but in return they also define it (Ruppert, Law et al. 2013). For example, the BBC WS measures its own success according to the number of clicks received on Facebook. Once this measure of success has been determined, BBC WS management and journalists make decisions on the type of stories to publish in order to receive the maximum number of clicks. Thus, the social practices which determine the setup of an analytics system consequently shape journalistic practices.

The combined use of qualitative and social media analytics data makes my research unique of its kind. Most studies of social media study online social media practices either through large data sets (Boyd, Golder et al. 2010, Bruns and Burgess 2011, Small 2011) or by using ethnography (Hine 2000, Murthy 2008), but not both. While Kozinets's book *Netography* (2010) outlines an approach combining qualitative and quantitative online methods, my study incorporates both online and offline methods as well. As early as 2003, before the launch of Facebook and Twitter, Leander and McKim (2003) argued that the internet is not a space separate from the 'real' world, meaning that digital media use needs to be studied across both online and offline sites, which I have applied to this study.

There is currently a debate in the social sciences about the implications of the increasing occurrence of digital and transactional data for the future of social research (Savage and Burrows 2007, Law, Ruppert et al. 2011). Governments, private companies and computer scientists use transactional, digital and big data to describe social phenomena, while also monopolising access to these tools (Ruppert 2013). There is debate over whether social scientists should persist with their usual methods of qualitative research and quantitative surveys, using them to focus on the meaning and implications of new digital tools and data for the social world (Ruppert, Law et al. 2013), or alternatively change their methods and start working with digital data as well. If they do not adapt, social researchers will stay outside new methodological developments and risk social knowledge eventually being available only to the private sector, governments and computer scientists, who have the resources to develop data mining tools and acquire the necessary skills to use them (Lazer, Pentland et al. 2009). I agree with those scholars who argue that a new type of social science is necessary if the range of individual and collective behaviour that takes place online is to be captured (Lazer, Pentland et al. 2009, Christakis 2012, Ruppert, Law et al. 2013).

Data collected from social media big data is particularly attractive because it allows social scientists to observe the social behaviour of large groups of people relatively cheaply and without having to rely on people's memory in retrospective surveys (Gleibs 2014). These online social imprints have thus become useful for scientists, corporations, journalists and governments alike. However, there are ethical issues involved in studying people's online social interactions, such as consent, anonymity and privacy, and these are discussed later in this chapter.

When studying social media, it is necessary to understand Facebook and Twitter's own analytics systems, which they make available to their clients. In addition, apart from the social media platforms' own systems, there are a number of subscription-based

analytics tools available for companies like the BBC to purchase in order to analyse their social media audiences. The key systems used by the BBC, and therefore those I used for my study, are Sysomos and Facebook Analytics. Facebook does not provide its data to third party monitoring systems like Sysomos, making it necessary to use Facebook's own analytics system. Twitter, on the other hand, shares data with Sysomos, which is a Twitter certified monitoring solution.<sup>18</sup> The log-ins for these systems are only available to BBC staff, so as part of negotiating access to the field I had to secure access to these tools. The next section provides an explanation of these systems and the type of data they provide.

*Facebook Analytics* is a tool that can be used by companies and individuals to track users' interactions with their Facebook fan pages. The BBC WS manages a number of fan pages, and I have focused on BBC Africa<sup>19</sup> and Love African Football,<sup>20</sup> using Facebook Analytics to track users' behaviour on them. The tool provides a collection of data taken from user profiles on Facebook, including demographic data such as gender, age, geographic location and measures referred to as 'interaction insights', which show detailed information about consumption and interaction patterns. Only those with administrator rights can view Facebook Analytics data. The following measures are available as part of the interaction insight tool.

Likes – administrators can see how many likes a piece of content has received.

Posts – administrators can see how many Facebook users like, comment on and share particular posts. Posts that receive many likes, comments and shares show up more in users' news feeds and are seen by more people. Administrators can also see how specific posts and types of posts perform, so they can focus on creating posts that create more impact.

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<sup>18</sup> Twitter has approved Sysomos to use their data and acknowledges that they do so accurately. <<https://sysomos.com/about-us>> accessed 15th October 2015.

<sup>19</sup> <<https://www.facebook.com/bbcafrica?fref=ts>> accessed 16th October 2015.

<sup>20</sup> <<https://www.facebook.com/LoveAfricanFootball?fref=ts>> accessed 16th October 2015.

Visits – administrators can see where on the internet people are coming from to get to their page and where on the fan page they are going once they arrive.

People – administrators can find out who follows their page and who likes, comments on and shares their posts as well as comparing their demographic profiles to other fan pages on Facebook.

*Sysomos* is a social media monitoring tool which allows its clients to mine and analyse content from social media and other user-generated content platforms such as blogs.<sup>21</sup>

The BBC subscribes to this analytics package, which allows the BBC's in-house researchers to analyse who has commented on their content, which country and city commenters are from, what their age and gender are and what they have said. It also provides Twitter accounts with authority scores to show which users are influencers worth targeting in order to reach out to more people. Twitter accounts are given an authority score between 0 and 10, where 10 is the most authoritative. Authority is measured through a combination of values including: a) how many followers the account has; b) how much influence the account has beyond Twitter – i.e. if other sources such as blogs and news sites link to it; c) how many re-tweets the account has; and finally d) the frequency of posts. I was given a Sysomos log-in so I could use the package in the same way as BBC African services producers.

When using social media analytics systems it is important to remember that they were designed for commercial and administrative purposes rather than for understanding democratic debate. It is therefore important to examine social media data with an analytical lens to go beyond what the data is describing for commercial purposes. For example, rather than just focusing on how many Twitter users the BBC reaches, I have analysed the conversational value of Twitter and whether those who tweet have the opportunity to reframe questions and create their own content on the platform. I have

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21 <<https://sysomos.com/products/map>> accessed 15th October 2015.

also carried out similar analysis on Facebook. In addition, there are a number of data validity issues that need to be considered when analysing web produced statistics from social media. For instance, all the demographic data in this thesis is based on information added by users to their own profiles, which makes the data vulnerable to false claims about age, gender and geographic location. However, this is not unique to social media, and all research methods that rely on people giving correct information, such as questionnaires and interviews, suffer from the same limitations. Furthermore, social media users can use IP addresses registered in other countries to avoid censorship or to get access to additional services from the BBC or other providers, which skews geographic data about where audiences are based. However, despite these limitations it was necessary to use these tools in order to understand the social phenomenon of participatory journalism. I argue that analytics tools form an integral part of participatory journalism, including monitoring, evaluation and responsiveness to audiences. Studying social media as part of the social phenomenon of participatory journalism has helped me to better understand the social practices of producers and audiences.

Against the backdrop of current debates about the limitations of digital transactional data and its use in social sciences (Lazer, Pentland et al. 2009, Christakis 2012, Ruppert, Law et al. 2013), I have taken the limitations of using big data into account, including the sometimes narrow and commercial focus of the data collected. I argue that by doing this I have produced knowledge that extends our understanding of participatory journalism beyond the narrow scope of what journalists themselves say about their practices. I have aimed to understand and analyse the data to which producers and management themselves have access, but I have re-analysed it critically and for academic purposes and thus contributed to knowledge not only about participatory journalism but also about how different methods designed for different purposes can interact. The following section is dedicated to research practices and

outlines how I have operationalised the principles outlined above as manageable practices.

### **3.3 Practices**

This section outlines the three case studies, or mediated moments, that form the foundation for the analysis in this thesis, including the background and research rationale for each study.

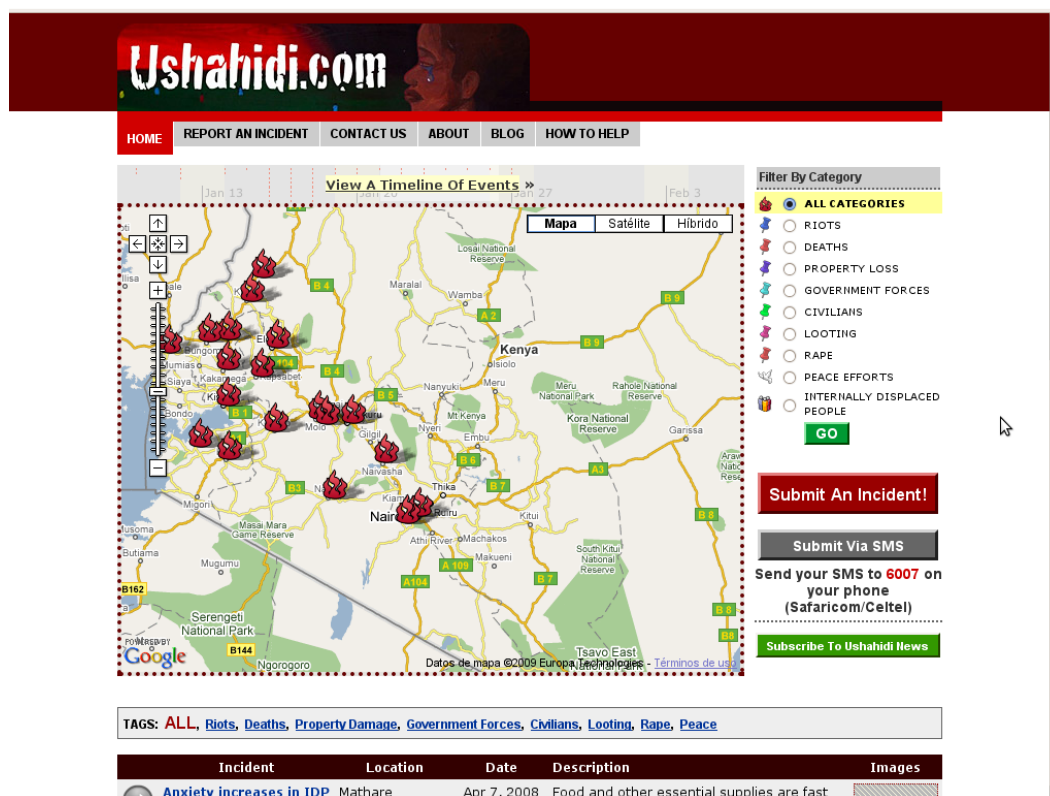
#### **3.3.1 Mediated moment one: facilitating personal experiences of voting in the 2011 Nigerian election**

During the build-up to Nigeria's presidential election on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011, the BBC African services<sup>22</sup> tested Ushahidi, a platform aimed at incorporating citizen journalism in reporting of the election. Ushahidi is a crowdmapping tool which helps people map events collectively, which was developed and used by citizen reporters during the 2008 Kenyan post-election crisis to map where violence was taking place. An important part of the Ushahidi platform is that it helps visualise reports and data from citizen journalists on maps or timelines. A screenshot of the map of reports from the Kenyan election can be seen below.

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<sup>22</sup> In this case the initiative was led by the BBC's Future Media team, which at the time also oversaw the editorial direction of the BBC World Service's websites and social media strategy.





Picture 3.1 — Screen grab of the Ushahidi Crowdmap 2007-2008.  
Source: <<https://tavaana.org/en/content/ushahidi-crisis-mapping-kenya-mapping-globe>>  
accessed 11<sup>th</sup> February 2015

I was embedded with the Nigerian Election desk at the BBC Africa Hub in Bush House in London and took part in the sourcing and moderation of user comments added to the Ushahidi map. My embeddedness allowed me to observe the production as it happened and take detailed fieldnotes of the practices I witnessed.

The rationale for studying the Ushahidi election coverage was to capture whether participatory journalism allows audiences to report on their own personal narratives and stories, thus helping people to share common values (Ryfe 2006). Sharing personal narratives and stories was identified in Chapter 2 as an important aspect of democratic debate. Ushahidi means ‘testimony’ in Swahili, and this analysis focuses on how the BBC WS mediated citizens’ testimonies of their personal experiences of the 2011 Nigerian election. The title of the BBC WS initiative was: *Nigeria votes 2011: electing a*

*president – mapping people's personal experiences of voting in Nigeria's presidential elections.* Thus, journalists were asking the Nigerian public to provide their own personal testimonies of the election. On the Ushahidi website the platform is described as:

An open source platform for democratizing information, increasing transparency and lowering the barriers for individuals to share their stories.

Ushahidi therefore had the potential to serve as an ideal space which allowed people's own stories to be heard, in line with Young's (1989) and Ryfe's (2006) ideas of relational deliberation.

The Nigerian election in 2011 and the period leading up to it showed examples of antagonistic debate in the Nigerian public sphere because of divisions between the largely Muslim population in the north and the Christian south. I have argued in Chapter 2 that Mouffe's (1999) idea of antagonism as being integral to politics is crucial for allowing for a pluralist democratic debate to take place. Mouffe argues that there is a difference between the political and politics, with the political dimension being antagonistic because identities are constructed through difference between 'us' and 'them', while politics consists of the practices of creating order in a society, typically a nation state. However, politics is antagonistic because of the political dimension, where power struggles between 'us' and 'them' are played out. The BBC Africa team opened up a space where citizens could discuss their experience of the election, which not only gave me an opportunity to study democratic debates about politics, but also gave me an entry point to the political field of clashing identities impacting on politics in Nigeria. Nigerian elections and the use of social media have been studied before (Ifukor 2010), but not in relation to journalism and an international broadcaster.

In the past, Nigerian elections have been tainted by fraud, corruption and in some cases violence (Yushau 2011). During the 2007 Nigerian election there were over 300 deaths

related to violence according to Human Rights Watch 2011<sup>23</sup> and the 2011 elections were predicted to test the credibility of elections and the stability of the country's democracy (Yushau 2011). The Nigerian constitution states that the presidency of the country should alternate between the south and the north, and after President Umaru Musa Yaraduwa, a northerner, died in May 2010, his deputy Goodluck Jonathan, a southerner, took over the presidency (Yushau 2011).

As a result of these divisions, there was concern that any sign of election fraud or corruption which favoured one candidate could provoke riots and violence (Yushau 2011). As a result, a decision was taken that election coverage would be cautious so as not to encourage antagonism (Fieldnotes 21<sup>st</sup> March 2011). BBC management was worried that the election would erupt into violence similar to the events which had accompanied Kenya's 2007 election,<sup>24</sup> and that social media used by the BBC could become a platform for spreading political information (Fieldnotes 21<sup>st</sup> March 2011, meeting with Social Media Editor). Despite this worry, social media was seen as a way of reaching young voters with mobile phones and engaging them in a debate about democracy and free elections:

Social Media is going to play a significant role on the ground for people using mobile phones and sending in pictures and video. This is what could be seen in Tunisia and Egypt as well. There is not going to be a social media revolution but people can report rigging using their simple mobile phones (Head of BBC Hausa Service 21<sup>st</sup> March 2011).

Due to concerns about the Ushahidi map being taken over by political interest groups, the project was twice almost cancelled by the commissioner before it finally went ahead (Fieldnotes 21<sup>st</sup> March 2011, meeting with Social Media Editor). After many meetings

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23 <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2011/03/13/nigeria-pass-bill-prosecute-electoral-abuses>> accessed 11th February 2015.

24 From December 2007 to February 2008, Kenya experienced ethnic violence triggered by a disputed presidential election held on 27 December 2007. <<http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/crises/crisis-in-kenya>> accessed 11th February 2015.

with senior managers and commissioners, it was finally decided that a BBC social media initiative would cover the elections. However, in the end the project was launched as a trial, and instead of a map where the public could write, report and post themselves, the editors at the Africa news desk would take user-generated content from Facebook and Twitter, verify it and then manually insert citizens' comments on the map. In addition, there was very little promotion of the map on the BBC WS's other platforms on the website or its radio programmes. The whole initiative was kept very low key due to the fear that the map would be taken over by political activists.

As a result of the potential for controversy during the election, the BBC call to action that went out to audiences on Facebook and the BBC Africa website was phrased as a deliberately non-agonistic request:

Nigerians are going to the polls today, to vote for the country's next president. As part of the BBC's coverage we want to capture the voting experiences of ordinary Nigerians. So we're asking you to send us your photos and reports of what is happening in your area. Tell us where you are, what is happening and we will add you to the map<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> BBC WS Facebook post <<https://www.facebook.com/bbcworldservice/posts/211625208866955>> accessed 21st January 2017.



Picture 3.2 — Screen grab from BBC WS Facebook page.

Source: <<https://www.facebook.com/bbcworldservice/posts/211625208866955>> accessed 29<sup>th</sup> January 2017.

This call to action encouraged Nigeria's voting public to report what was going on in their area, inviting them to talk about their own personal experience. The public had the opportunity to control the message and tell the stories they wanted to be told, at least in principle. However, a limiting factor for participation was that rather than allowing the public to publish the comments directly on the map, the professional filter of moderation meant that although the public was encouraged to send in reports, the BBC producers were ultimately in charge of what was being reported. The Nigerian election map was as a good opportunity to study the balance between citizens' stories and the BBC African services' role in controlling the message. Next follows an explanation of how I collected and analysed the data before, during and after the election.

As a result of the cautious promotion of the map, there were only 65 audience contributions to the map by election day, 16th April – 60 via Facebook, three via email and two via SMS. There were 47 entries reported on the map, of which eleven were written by BBC reporters. Hence, 36 actual audience reports were used on the map, or 55% of the contributions. Contributions were edited out largely because of a lack of information about where the contributor was writing from, meaning that their report could not be placed accurately on the map. However, some reports were left out because they contained potentially contentious content. I carried out analysis before, during and after the election, using detailed fieldnotes based on observations and interviews from: a) the build-up and planning of the Election Map initiative in February and March where I attended planning meetings; b) election day on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011; and c) Ushahidi entries from citizen journalists that came in via Facebook and SMS on the day of the election.

My insider status at the BBC WS made it possible for me to gain access to reports that came in from the public via Facebook and SMS in an Excel spreadsheet – the same spreadsheet used by the editors to verify and edit the reports before they went up on the map. In total I had access to 25 original audience reports from Facebook and SMS, and I could compare them to the corresponding 25 posts that went up on the Ushahidi map. I also had access to 19 reports from members of the public that were screened out and not posted on the map, which I analysed in detail in order to find patterns in the reasons they were not included. My unique access and my ability to analyse discarded reports from citizen journalism adds an additional rare layer to this research.

An election is a news event that only happens every few years. In order to understand how a more regular type of mediated debate at the BBC African service influences participation on an on-going basis, I studied a new monthly debate programme – BBC Africa Debate – which I explain in the next section.

### 3.3.2 Mediated moment two: BBC Africa – an audience-led debate



*Picture 3.3 — BBC Africa Debate logo*

BBC Africa Debate launched in January 2012, since which it has been a regular feature in the BBC WS schedule, broadcast from a different African location each month. Its remit is to be an audience-led programme with an emphasis on audience participation across different platforms, making it a unique BBC WS radio programme in its own right. It is also the only regular debate programme broadcast on BBC WS radio.

From the start, the new show was launched with a participatory social media proposition (Fieldnotes 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2011). Producers and management saw BBC Africa Debate as a participatory programme for three reasons: a) the studio audience participates in and to a certain extent leads the debate; b) the debate topic is discussed on social media before, during and after the programme; and c) social media is used to interact with tweeters, bloggers and other interest groups who use the internet and are interested in discussing the issues debated.

I selected this mediated moment in order to assess whether BBC Africa Debate and its increased focus on audience participation fulfils the criteria of democratic debate. I focus particularly on the following three issues.

a) Including personal narratives as a way of building mutual understanding of topics in debate (Young and Press 2000, Escobar 2009).

b) Including arguments based on different forms of knowledge – such as expert, experiential and emotional knowledge – according to the dialogic criteria for democratic deliberation discussed in Chapter 2 (Escobar 2009).

c) Seeking mutuality between producers and audiences (Buber 2004), as outlined in Chapter 2.

The advantage of debate programmes is that politicians, experts and ordinary people are put together in one room. While the confrontation between these groups makes it possible to hold those in power to account (Livingstone and Lunt 1994, Carpentier 2011), the confrontational nature of the debate can also be a disadvantage if it leads to a trivialisation of the topics being discussed. The debate can also be described as unstable, with a series of unrelated utterances which give an illusion of a debate whilst in fact participants are not actually seeking mutuality (Tomasulo 1984). Despite the presenter's efforts facilitate respect and ideal role taking, it is also very difficult to get the power balance right between the host, the experts and the audience (Carpentier 2011). Previous research on debate programmes has shown that the way a host manages the structures and decides who talks alters the power dynamics of the conversations, with implications for democratic deliberation (Priest 1995).

BBC Africa Debate is hosted by two presenters in front of a live audience of 100 invited guests, including international and local media, NGOs, foreign and local business people, government representatives, opposition parties, activists, tweeters, bloggers, students and academics. The topic for each debate is chosen by the BBC Africa Debate team and deals with a current and relevant African issue. During my time with the production team, the following BBC Africa Debate radio programmes were broadcast.



<p><b>1. International Justice: Is Africa on trial?</b> 30<sup>th</sup> March 2012.</p> <p>Place of broadcast: Nairobi in Kenya</p>
<p><b>2. Africa's Global Image: Justified or Prejudice?</b> 27<sup>th</sup> April 2012.</p> <p>Place of broadcast: Kampala in Uganda.</p>
<p><b>3. China in Africa: Partner or Plunderer?</b> Friday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2012.</p> <p>Place of Broadcast: Lusaka in Zambia.</p>

*Table 3.1 — List of programmes observed*



*Picture 3.4 — Screen grab of BBC Africa Debate website, promoting the programme Africa's global image: Justified or prejudiced? Broadcast on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2012.*

*Source: < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00r08yz> > accessed 28<sup>th</sup> January 2017.*

For each programme there was a panel of four to six experts selected to introduce the issues to the audience and provide authoritative views during the debate. Social media was used to interact with tweeters, bloggers and other interest groups who wanted to

discuss the issues debated. Some social media contributions were read out during the show, although social media comments are not an important part of the broadcast and most discussion takes place in the studio. According to the team of producers, the reason for this is that there is a delay of a few hours before the radio programme is broadcast, which makes it inappropriate to read out Twitter and Facebook contributions as they come in, as this would give the impression that the programme was being broadcast live. As a result, the radio debate and the social media debate are largely kept separate. If the radio programme alone is taken as the unit of analysis, the social media contributions might not seem to provide the audience with any control or power to participate. However, looking at the debates on social media, which in some cases take place irrespective of the radio programme, it can be seen that influential tweeters often take control of a debate originally started by the BBC African services but taken further by the audience in a social media space.

Based in the BBC WS London Office in Bush House, I followed the broadcast and social media interactions around three Africa Debate programmes over three months between March and May 2012. I was able to follow the planning, production and debriefing in the London newsroom before and after the recording of the radio shows, which took place in different African locations each month. My approach during this period was to become as integrated with the production team as possible and spend time in the office observing day to day journalistic practices. I not only used the social media analysis I carried out directly for my research, but also presented my findings to the BBC Africa Debate team every month after each broadcast in order to capture their instant feedback and reflexivity about their own performance. In addition, I also carried out in depth face to face interviews with producers and managers at the BBC African services. Including with the following individuals with job titles<sup>26</sup>:

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26 Their names are not published in order to be able to keep their identities anonymous.

- *BBC Africa's Senior Editor* – responsible for all BBC Africa outputs on radio, online and TV in English
- *BBC Africa's Social Media Editor* – responsible for all BBC Africa content published on any social media platform in English
- *Senior Producer of Africa Debate* – responsible for the production of the monthly radio programme BBC Africa Debate
- *Producer of Africa Debate* – assisting with the production of the monthly radio programme BBC Africa Debate

Apart from these individuals I also spoke to over 20 additional members of staff at the BBC African services by attending meetings and spending time in the BBC Africa news room in Bush House. Apart from observing and interviewing production staff, my main analysis for this mediated moment was of the BBC African services' Twitter activity, using the Sysomos analytics system.<sup>27</sup> Twitter allows users to post short messages, up to 140 characters long, that can be read by any other Twitter user. Users follow other users who interest them, and they are notified when users they follow post a new message. The 140 character word limit and functionality allowing retweets and references to other users permit rapid interactions to take place between users. Twitter can therefore be seen as functioning as a conversational tool (Honey and Herring 2009, Golder and Lotan 2010). The BBC Africa Debate team uses Twitter to allow audiences to participate in the BBC Africa Debate programme, making it an important platform to study if one wants to understand participatory journalism and its contribution to democratic debate. My study includes Twitter analysis for each Africa Debate programme analysed, including frequency counts, top tweeters and tweets, thematic analysis, geographic spread and gender and age analysis of social media audiences.

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<sup>27</sup> Sysomos trawls and sorts social media information in a similar way to how Google sources information for its search engine. Sysomos allows users to search for key words and understand what Twitter users have said and how they have responded to different topics.

I defined my search criteria to capture those tweets and tweeters who mentioned the following terms during the three-month fieldwork period: 'africa debate', 'africadebate', '#bbcafricadebate', 'bbc africa debate'. There were 4075 tweets mentioning any of these search terms between 1st March and 26th June 2012. Most mentions on Twitter took place on the day of the radio broadcast, the last Friday of each month. However, a third of all tweeters mentioned any one of the search terms at least 10 times during the three-month fieldwork period, showing a certain level of engagement with the issues being discussed and loyalty to the BBC Africa Debate programme.

The topics covered by BBC Africa Debate concerned African justice and international relations and Africa's image, all of which are important for international politics and diplomacy. The relevance of the next mediated moment to international democratic debate is perhaps less obvious, but I will argue that the BBC Africa Cup of Nations Facebook fan page represents democratic debate about loyalty, identity and governance.

### 3.3.3 Mediated moment three: Africa Cup of Nations – football fandom and political debate



*Picture 3.5 — Logo of BBC Love African Football*

The Africa Cup of Nations is a football competition for African national football teams, held every two years. First held in 1957, it is the main international football competition in Africa.<sup>28</sup> The 2013 edition, known as AFCON 13, was held in South Africa between 19<sup>th</sup> January and 10<sup>th</sup> February, and the BBC Africa services took a new approach in covering the tournament, using social media to boost participation compared to previous years (fieldnotes 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2012). My previous research shows that football is typically the most discussed topic on BBC Africa's Facebook pages and other BBC Africa Twitter accounts, so it is an important way for the BBC African services to connect to their audiences (Andersson 2010). Football is the world's most popular sport (Giulianotti (2012), and it is also the most popular sport in Africa (Saavedra 2003). However, football's popularity in Africa and on social media is not the only reason that it is important for democratic debate.

In Chapter 2, I argue that public debate is central to the building of a functioning democracy (Chambers 2003). Thus, democracy building takes place through the

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<sup>28</sup> CAF Website <<http://www.cafOnline.com/en-us/competitions/orangeafricacupofnations,equatorialguinea2015/about/Background>> accessed 19th October 2015.

provision of spaces where people can comfortably discuss politics, and such debates have a positive impact on politics and democratisation processes (Ogundimu 2003). Media and journalism play an important role in forming such spaces, both by providing information and news and increasingly by using participatory journalism to provide spaces for debate where the roles of producers and audiences are blurred. In traditional news, sport coverage is often deemed subordinate to 'hard' news, and is therefore not seen as important for democratic debate (Frère 2011:188-199). 'Hard' news is usually defined as 'foreign and domestic politics, economy and finance', whilst 'soft' news includes 'reports about celebrities, human interest, sport and other entertainment' (Reinemann, Stanyer et al. 2011: 223-224). In Chapter 2, I disagreed with this strict division between forms of journalism which are considered important for democracy and others which are not, especially in the context of Africa, where popular media, music, poetry etc. play an important part in challenging dominant discourses (Mano 2007, Nyamnjoh 2010, Wasserman 2010).

I adopt Mouffe's (2009) distinction between the political and politics, as discussed in Chapter 2. The political is the antagonistic dimension of society, which is always present because social identities only exist in relation to difference from 'the other' (Mouffe 2009), while politics describes the administration and governance of society. Football, I argue, is part of the political field, and Love African Football is a space where the agonistic dimension of 'the other' is played out in terms of national loyalties expressed as support for national football teams.

Football has been studied and found to be relevant to a number of social and political arenas applicable to my analysis of Facebook participation around AFCON 13, including globalisation, international governance, corruption and the media. This was illustrated by the 2015 FIFA corruption controversy, which not only became news but

was also a cause for international law and politics.<sup>29</sup> European domination of sport governance and international bodies like FIFA impacts on African football in numerous ways (Darby 2002). For example, Africa and African football receive very little money from international football, or from the African players who play in European leagues. Despite FIFA's contributions in terms of cash and development programmes, corruption and the snapping up of future talent by European clubs have stifled football in Africa. Match fixing is another issue which undermines faith in the sport, as when Zimbabwean players and officials were banned for life for their role in the 'Asiagate' match fixing scandal in 2012.<sup>30</sup> Satellite TV has also made the European football leagues increasingly accessible to African audiences, which further marginalises local football in Africa by reducing viewing figures and funding.

The above issues all relate to international governance, transnational politics and inequality between the Global North and the Global South. I therefore argue that football is an important forum where both the political and politics is discussed, making study of public debate in this space relevant. One of the criteria of democratic debate discussed in Chapter 2 is mutual exploration of the most important values held by participants. I argue that debates about football can represent these values and make it easier for them to be discussed in society.

Audience participation during AFCON 13 took place via the *Love African Football* Facebook page and the *Love Football* Twitter feed, where journalists deployed in South Africa could post messages and gather material for their radio broadcasts. I carried out my study mainly on Facebook, monitoring updates from producers and audiences. A social media editor responsible for updating most of the content on the fan page and the Twitter feed was deployed in South Africa during the tournament. In addition to my social media observation, I conducted interviews with the South Africa-based social

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29 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-32897066>> accessed 20th December 2015.

30 <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/feb/01/zimbabwe-footballers-suspended-asiagate-match-fixing>> accessed 12th July 2015.

media editor both before and after AFCON 13, the BBC Africa Sport editor who wrote and posted articles for Facebook, and the User Generated Content (UGC) editor responsible for incorporating comments from Love African Football into other BBC WS coverage of AFCON 13.

Hoping to attract as many new fans as possible during AFCON 13, the BBC marketing department ran a campaign simultaneously promoting the fan page and the Twitter feed via social media posts and web banners on Africa-focused web portals. In only a few weeks, the Love African Football page attracted more followers (137,742) than the BBC Africa Facebook page (117,479), which had grown organically over a two-year period. The Twitter feed was not quite as successful, growing from zero to 5,846 followers in the same time period. The level of engagement with the Love African Football page made this an interesting mediated moment to use to study audience interactions at the BBC African services. As well as observing and interviewing the Love African Football production team, I carried out interviews with the relevant BBC marketing executive responsible for the campaign, as well as accessing their brand proposal<sup>31</sup> and campaign report.<sup>32</sup>

The majority of my time was spent talking to Love African Football's production team and social media editor, who are part of the BBC Africa team. I also spent time with other producers and journalists, including sport journalists and BBC UGC hub staff, who also posted content on Love African Football. Together they posted a total of 477 mixed media items on the Love African Football timeline between 19th January and 10th February, the duration of AFCON 13. I was interested in interactions between producers and fans on the page, and I therefore analysed BBC posts as well as comments made by fans in response. On average, each post received 92 comments

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31 Love African Football – Branding Proposal, December 2012.

32 BBC World Service Marketing Campaign Report – Africa Cup of Nation 2013 – Twitter & Facebook.



from audiences, although some received over 2000. I coded the BBC posts into four categories based on the themes of the posts, as will be outlined in Chapter 5.

### 3.4 Data analysis

The qualitative data collection I conducted, consisting of interviews and participant observation, produced rich text data in the form of interview transcripts and detailed fieldnotes, as outlined in the methods section above. In order to aid analysis, I approached my observations and interview questions with my overarching research questions in mind. Qualitative and quantitative data were put into dialogue with each other and coded under common research themes, with the qualitative data being analysed from transcripts and fieldnotes, while the quantitative data was analysed using Excel spreadsheets.

My qualitative data was recorded and analysed as follows.



*Picture 3.6 — Extensive notes were collected during fieldwork period 2011-2013*

I kept detailed fieldnotes during my time at the BBC WS, writing down observations and meeting notes. When at the BBC WS, I captured my notes in a hardcopy notebook, transferring them to a Google Docs file at the end of each day. Once I had typed up my notes, I also added reflections and initial analysis relating to my research questions, highlighting these within the document in red.

The most challenging aspect of observing and taking fieldnotes was deciding what to capture as data. I tried to keep my research questions in mind as I sat in meetings, looked through strategy documents, examined programme schedules pinned to the wall or drank coffee with editors in the Bush House canteen. I also kept a constant eye on Facebook and Twitter, checking every post, like or retweet by the journalists I followed. Although I tried to stay focused, my fieldwork also involved a lot of trial and error, and I often suffered from data overload. In the end I have used only a fraction of the material I gathered, but of course this is part of the ethnographic experience.

All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. I included the transcripts in my fieldnotes in Google Docs, so that all my notes and transcripts were in one place, in chronological order. I also printed out my fieldnotes and transcripts so I could code them manually using marker pens and Post-it notes. When I spotted a pattern or theme, I wrote it down on a flipchart on my office wall, which is how I started to build the structure for my empirical chapters. The analysis process was not linear, but rather my themes developed over months and even years.

My quantitative data was kept and analysed in the following way.

All social media data was exported from Sysomos and Facebook Analytics and kept in Excel spreadsheets. I had to manually cut and paste the data from the Ushahidi crowdmap into Excel. Once I had all the data in Excel, I could start analysing and coding the data based on numerical and qualitative measures. Although the data included numbers and the cells in the spreadsheet could be added up, this does not

mean that I only counted instances. I also tried to understand the depth and breadth of the meanings of the social media posts by approaching the data from the analytics systems in a qualitative way.

**Mediated moment 1 – Ushahidi data.** In this case, the data consisted of the posts sent in by the public, the posts that eventually went up on the Ushahidi map, the time they were posted and whether or not they were verified. From this data I could analyse the posts and determine any similarities or differences between posts that were published and those that were not. I could also analyse patterns in the editing of posts and any common themes and significant differences between them.

**Mediated moment 2 – Twitter data.** As I explained earlier, I used the BBC's Sysomos account to gather all mentions of BBC Africa Debate. For each programme, I included every tweet which mentioned BBC Africa Debate in chronological order in my spreadsheet, including information about the Twitter account that posted the tweet and the number of followers the account had at the time. I also carried out hashtag analysis to see how conversations were linked, recorded whether the tweets were retweets or mentions and analysed how the messages were linked. By carrying out this network analysis I was able to understand the flow of conversation and what was said in relation to BBC Africa Debate.

**Mediated moment 3 – Facebook data.** I used Facebook Analytics to export all data about interactions on the Love African Football fan page during AFCON 13. This data included all items posted by the BBC team during that period and the number of comments, likes and clicks each story received, allowing me to see which were the most popular posts. I then had to go to the Love African Football Facebook page to copy and paste all comments from fans for each post so I could analyse them. I coded the posts written by BBC journalists into themes, depending on the type of content they

contained and whether they included questions, status updates on games, results, links to articles, videos or analysis pieces.

As with my qualitative data, I grouped my quantitative data into themes or codes. I usually used Excel for the initial coding then transferred the data into Google Docs so I could compare it more fluidly with my other sources.

What I have described above are largely the practical considerations of my data analysis. The following paragraphs provide a theoretical and analytical approach to how I used the data.

My analysis consisted of moving backwards and forwards between the theory of deliberative democracy and the data I collected. This backwards and forwards movement between theory and data is common and forms part of the reflexive analysis of ethnographic data (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). In practice this meant that I alternated between reading and writing theory and asking questions in the field. I had an idea of the questions I wanted to ask about participation and journalistic practices by interviewing and observing, but the answers I got by talking to research participants made it necessary to return to the theory and question and reformulate my ideas about mediated participation and democratic debate. Thus, I moved between developing the ideas in my theoretical framework and analysing my data, changing my ideas as a result of this dialectic movement.

Although I used the theoretical framework of democratic debate to analyse my data, there were also elements of emic categorisation. To understand a culture emically means taking an insider's point of view, describing practices in the way participants themselves do, an approach first applied by the renowned ethnographer Malinowski (1922). In relation to my study, emic analysis focused on the themes which the journalists I observed found important and relevant to participatory journalism and fostering a global debate. Many issues emerged which related to cost-cutting,

remaining relevant to audiences and getting stories out to new audiences, although journalists did not talk a great deal about fostering more democratic news participation through social media. In order to be able to critically analyse journalists' practices I needed a normative framework. Using Habermas's (1989) theory of the public sphere and Escobar's (2011) concept of dialogic deliberation allowed me to analyse and understand participatory journalism in relation to concepts of deliberative democracy and dialogue. Applying theory and using it as a starting point for analysis is called etic analysis. Thus, a combination of both emic and etic analysis and categorisation was applied to the analysis of the accounts gathered from the various data sources. The themes were summarised and then related back to the research questions, as demonstrated in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

### **3.5 Challenges of integrated methods – research ethics**

This ethics section is divided into two parts, with Section 3.5.1 dealing with face to face research and Section 3.5.2 addressing online social media research. However, for many ethical considerations concerning privacy, harm and exploitation, the same guidelines apply whether research is carried out face to face or online.

#### **3.5.1 Ethical considerations of participant observation**

There are a series of potential ethical concerns involved in carrying out research within an organisation. However, in principle many ethical considerations are the same as those encountered in any research involving participants. Such concerns involve relationships with and responsibilities to research participants, including informed consent, privacy, harm and exploitation (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). This section will discuss how I dealt with these issues when carrying out this study.

The consent procedure was managed through a three-step approach. First, prior to commencement of the research, an email was sent informing all employees of the BBC

African services invited to participate in the project about the research objectives and methods. Next, the senior manager at the relevant BBC service signed a form stating that sufficient information about consent, anonymity and data protection had been given to all staff participating in the research. Third, for each interview carried out, an information form was given out and participants were required to give verbal consent. In addition to consent, summary reports and interim analysis were made available to all key participants, giving them the 'right to reply' and allowing them an opportunity to withdraw their statement from my accounts. I saw sharing the findings of this research as an integral part of my role as a participant observer, and I updated participants on my analysis on an on-going basis. Despite this caution, I think there were times when we were busy working together when research participants forgot about my role as a researcher, such as during my presentation of social media analysis, when they told me about a programme or during the process of selecting audiences or editing social media posts. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) talk about this as something that often happens in ethnographic research because researchers actually want this to happen to some extent, so the participant can go about their usual behaviour as far as possible whilst the study is taking place.

My main ethical concern throughout the study was that the people I was observing and interviewing were ex-colleagues or people I had met through working at the BBC WS. I was constantly worried that my participants would forget my new status as a PhD student and invite me to a meeting as a colleague rather than as a researcher. In order to prevent this from happening, I continually reminded participants of my status as a PhD student, although they did not seem concerned or particularly interested but kept on being open and generous in sharing their experiences, practices and ideas. It was almost impossible to always tell all research participants everything about my study, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) also point out. During my study there were examples of meetings taking place where I introduced myself at the beginning of the meeting and

asked for consent, but five minutes after the meeting started someone else entered the room and joined the meeting. I thus fell short of using Bell's (1977) social research caution: 'anything you say or do may be used as data', but instead I ran after the involuntary research participant after the meeting when possible and explained my study and asked for consent in the corridor. However, there were people in the BBC African production hub who did not know I was a researcher because I never had a direct conversation with them. They went about their business of making programmes while I was busy with those who were participating directly in my study. As previously pointed out, all research falls somewhere on a spectrum between completely covert and completely open (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). I feel confident that I took every step I could to be as open and honest about my study as possible, but I still wonder whether my participants told me things just because they already knew me. In order to ensure the wellbeing of my research participants I treated them with honesty and integrity by being upfront about my study, its funding and its objectives and by carrying on the conversation about my study and my research interests throughout my fieldwork.

I also guaranteed research participants' anonymity and privacy and protected their data according to the guidelines set out in the British Sociological Association's guide for ethical research.<sup>33</sup> Research participants' identities were kept anonymous during the course of the research and care has been taken to ensure that no identifier of their entities is present in this thesis. I have made sure to use job titles that are generic enough that it is not clear exactly who said what. In order to prevent business sensitive information leaking out, extra care was taken when saving data and transferring it between computers and information systems. No data in its raw form was shared with anyone beyond the researcher. All use of potentially business sensitive information was checked with relevant members of staff before being included in the research findings

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33 <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/media/27107/StatementofEthicalPractice.pdf> accessed 22nd June 2010 accessed 7th November 2015.

in order to make sure that it was permissible to quote it for academic purposes. I now turn to the concern that research may cause participants physical, social or physiological harm.

As my research took place in the participants' workplace, I was mainly concerned not to cause any harm in terms of additional work-related stress, for example if they failed to complete their daily tasks because they were talking to me. This resulted in me feeling very cautious and careful and perhaps avoiding situations where I might have been able to collect data but where I felt I would be in the way. Journalism is a race against the clock, programmes have deadlines and news items are time sensitive, so I avoided asking questions when I could tell that my participants had tight deadlines to meet. I was also concerned not to include any information that would show my participants to be bad employees and so risk their careers, which relates to the anonymity point made above. My cautiousness meant that I spent many hours trying to keep out of journalists' way instead of asking pertinent questions. In addition, on many occasions I was stuck outside a journalist's or manager's office waiting to do an interview, sometimes for up to an hour, as the participant I had arranged to see was late. A colleague kept waiting in this way would be annoyed and would have pointed out their lateness. However, I realised that the journalists' primary objective in their workplace was to deliver the news, so I considered not harming their work life to be more important than my time. I often felt grateful for the time they gave me, which brings me to the issue of power and exploitation addressed in the next paragraph.

There are often major concerns about exploitation when research is about people who are less powerful and vulnerable, such as cancer patients, homeless people or victims of abuse (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). However, when carrying out research at the BBC African services I often felt that I was studying either sideways or upwards, as explained above. However, those I studied may still feel exploited by me wasting their



time without giving them anything in return, so in order to minimise any feelings of exploitation I tried to reciprocate by sharing my analysis with participants and rewriting my findings so my analysis could be useful in their work. I therefore aimed to base our relationship on reciprocity. It is of course possible to argue that I was studying down when observing African audiences' participation on social media, but they were unaware that I was studying them, making it difficult to base our relationship on reciprocity. The next section discusses the ethical considerations of carrying out research on integrated mediated moments.

### **3.5.2 Ethical considerations of social media research**

In conducting online research on social media platforms, I had to consider numerous ethical issues. Perhaps the most difficult ethical aspect of social media research is the continuing lack of any real established consensus within the research community on how to translate offline human subject research to online environments (Gleibs 2014). The following quote is taken from a call for abstracts for a research symposium held at the University of Jyväskylä on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2015, called 'Successes and failures in studying social media: issues of methods and ethics'.

Online and social media research are perhaps the most problematic of research areas from the methods and ethics perspectives as there are no rules of thumb to be applied to the range of research cases, web sites, platforms and laws of specific countries.<sup>34</sup>

The quote states that there is still a lack of ethical guidelines on a range of issues relating to social media research. Some researchers argue that everything online is within the public domain, and therefore those who participate in social media forums know that what they post is not private. However, others adopt the same ethical

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<sup>34</sup> 'Successes and failures in studying social media: issues of methods and ethics' <https://someri.wordpress.com/> accessed 7th November 2015.

standards online as they do offline, where informed consent and the right to privacy are crucial elements of conducting ethical research (Gleibs 2014). Despite the lack of an established ethics framework for social media research, when planning this research and applying for ethical clearance I followed a combination of ethical guidelines from other researchers carrying out similar social media research, which I will discuss in this section. The key social media research ethics issues I will discuss in relation to in my study are anonymity, privacy and lack of informed consent. However, as with offline research, I was cautious about potentially causing harm to anyone participating in any of the forums I researched, as well as about exploiting research participants in any way through my use of the data collected.

The main question to address before starting to collect data on social media platforms is whether the data is public or private. While private data requires the research participant to provide informed consent, there are examples of data that can be collected from research participants without consent, such as observations in a public space like a park or publicly available documents (Milgram, Bickman et al. 1969, Goldstein, Cialdini et al. 2008). Of course, this is similar to the issues mentioned above relating to my face to face research, when I observed participants at their workplace. According to Zimmer, a typical standpoint for social media is to say that the data is already public (2010). However, my guiding principle for this study, in line with Nissenbaum (2009), is that the privateness or publicness of social media is contextual and depends on the purpose of the platform, the context in which the information was published and the person the message was intended to be shared with. I have therefore considered the different contexts of Facebook, Twitter and Ushahidi and hence the different ethical considerations that are necessary.

Before addressing the particular issue of privacy on different social media platforms, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that none of the three case studies involved

gathering profile information or private comments directed at personal friends or family, but rather concerned analysis of comments shared by audiences with the BBC on social networks. The BBC is a broadcaster, and in answering the BBC's call for participation and agreeing to share information with the BBC, audiences agree to their comments being used in broadcast material like radio programmes, websites and TV content. Therefore, analysing comments people have posted on BBC-managed social media platforms resembles content analysis of publicly available media texts. However, although audiences share their views with the BBC on social media willingly, they do not necessarily sign up to take part in social research, so I have treated issues of private versus public content with utmost care and concern.

Facebook allows users to restrict access to their profiles to groups such as 'friends only', members of particular 'networks' (such as Love African Football), or 'everyone'. Thus, a profile might not be discoverable or viewable to someone outside the boundaries of the access setting of a particular network. In terms of the Love African Football network, I could see what was shared with other members because I was myself part of the network. However, I agree with (Zimmer 2010) that when a Facebook user has not said that they are happy for 'everyone' to see their post, it is not ethical to share the post outside the network where it was intended to be shared. Hence, privacy is contextual, and what is public in one place is not to be shared outside the boundaries of that particular setting (Nissenbaum 2009). Therefore, in order to protect Facebook posters' anonymity and privacy, I have not included any Facebook comment in my analysis in its original format. I have also ensured the anonymity of those who posted on Facebook by removing all personal identifiers and references to the names of non-public figures such as friends or family from their posts. Thus, in line with Lewis, Kaufman et al.'s (2008: 30) study of college students' privacy settings on Facebook, 'all identifying information was deleted or encoded'.

The difference between Facebook and Twitter is that Facebook users may actually believe that what they say is only available to their friends in their own Facebook network. On the other hand, all Twitter accounts are always visible to everyone online, therefore everything people say on Twitter is public. In fact, it is not even necessary to have a Twitter account to access tweets. Twitter's privacy policy is quite clear with regards to the level of sharing people agree to by signing up to Twitter, as shown in the quote from Twitter's website below:

Tweets, Following, Lists and other Public Information: Our Services are primarily designed to help you share information with the world. Most of the information you provide us is information you are asking us to make public. This includes not only the messages you Tweet and the metadata provided with Tweets, such as when you Tweeted, but also the lists you create, the people you follow, the Tweets you mark as favourites or Retweet, and many other bits of information that result from your use of the Services. Our default is almost always to make the information you provide public for as long as you do not delete it from Twitter, but we generally give you settings to make the information more private if you want.<sup>35</sup>

The policy explains that the purpose of Twitter is to share information with the world, and Twitter will help its users do that for as long as they do not delete the information from their account. I therefore agree with Priego (2014) that

'the act of archiving and disseminating public information publicly does not have to be cause for an 'ethical dilemma', as long as the archived and disseminated information was public in the first instance' (Priego 2014: no page).

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<sup>35</sup> Twitter's privacy policy. <<https://twitter.com/privacy?lang=en>> accessed 19th October 2015.

However, I have still treated the information from private Twitter accounts with caution, acknowledging that consent to publicly broadcast one's view on Twitter is not the same as agreeing to have one's posts made public outside the boundaries of that particular network. Therefore, I have anonymised all the Twitter comments used in this study in order to make it impossible to trace any personal information about those who posted them.

Like Twitter, Ushahidi is a public platform, and the purpose of posting on it is to make information available to the public. The BBC's call to action asked people to post reports and add photos to the publicly available map. No log-in is required to see the crowdmaps on Ushahidi, and as a researcher I did not access any information that was not available to the public on the internet. Despite this, I removed all personal signifiers from my data set and I have not published any information in this thesis that compromises participants' anonymity or right to privacy.

Some of these privacy issues could potentially have been addressed by obtaining informed consent from research participants (Priego 2014). However, using large scale datasets of transactional data makes it extremely difficult to gain consent retrospectively from research participants who may have just commented once on Twitter using #bbcafricadebate. The data I analysed is the same as that available to BBC Africa producers when they conduct analysis of their users in order to target audiences with their services. I argue that the fact that participatory journalism involves audiences participating in broadcasting activity makes data analysis more like analysing a radio phone-in or a TV debate programme than like evaluating people's personal interactions on social networks. Although analytics systems have given me access to demographic information, I have only analysed demographic data quantitatively, not on an individual level, and no personal information is accessible through my analysis of location, age and gender. The ethical considerations of informed consent on social media are still up for

debate, and I want this research to form part of such discussions in relation to participatory journalism. When carrying out ethnography spanning many different sites, both online and offline, observing people on social media in many ways resembles observing people in public spaces. When considering research ethics today it is important to remember that the boundary between online and offline is blurred. For example, online was also a workplace for the journalists I observed.

### **3.6 Summary**

The overall research approach I consider most valuable for studying participatory journalism is participant observation, which I have used both in the BBC Africa newsroom and on social media platforms. The research field is therefore a mix of online and offline news production and consumption sites. I argue that being able to study both online and offline news production is crucial in media studies today, where so much of both content and production is split between different platforms. Media organisations, seeking a better understanding of their audiences on social media compared with other platforms, struggle to combine research methods, and academic research like this study can make a contribution to the understanding of new forms of production and audiencing.

I was able to study journalists' social practices in relation to social media both online and offline. However, due to constraints of geography and distance I was not able to study the audience of BBC Africa social media content offline in its cultural and social context. This is a major limitation of this study, and being able to interview and observe audiences in their local setting as they use and participate in journalism as part of their everyday lives would have added valuable insight. However, I argue that the ability to study geographically distant audiences who use social media brings the understanding of diverse audiences into closer reach for social researchers than perhaps has ever been the case before. It is important that not only private and public organisations

analyse audience data from social media platforms, but that academics are also able to critically analyse audience behaviour using web analytics data, as I have done as part of this study.

Social constructivism was used as a lens for studying both the newsroom and producers' and audiences' interactions with social media. In doing so I was able to understand the cultural context and social relationships that influence social practices of participatory journalism at the BBC WS. I argue that social constructivism and the social construction of technology (SCOT) need to be integrated to support researchers whose research approach involves studying a mix of human interaction and humans interacting with technology. In taking a constructivist approach, reflecting on my role in the research setting formed an integral part of this study.

This study combines analysis from both qualitative and quantitative data sources, a rare approach in media ethnographies to date. The quantitative data sources I have used are social media analytics gathered from Ushahidi, Facebook and Twitter. By engaging with transactional data gathered online for critical analysis and academic purposes I have contributed to current scholarly debates about the extension of the social sciences to incorporate such methods. Rather than favouring a particular collection method, using both qualitative and quantitative sources has helped deepen my understanding of the mediated moments I have studied.

Each mediated moment combines mixed methods and mixed sites of research through offline observation, interviews and online social media analysis and provides an entry point to the study of different elements of participation and democratic debate. Moment one, the Nigerian election, focuses on political discourse and personal stories about an election. Moment two, the BBC Africa Debate programme, looks at the blurred boundaries between producers and audiences and the question of whether this leads to increased participation and debate. Moment three, Love African Football, allowed me to

study the political field of identity through football fan culture. In order to gain an entry point into participatory journalism, it is important to study news stories or mediated news moments. Rather than sitting around in the BBC Africa newsroom waiting for something to happen, I was able to plan and strategically follow the production of these participatory initiatives. Selecting mediated moments made it easier to choose which social media to leave in and what to leave out, making research and analysis manageable. Choosing integrated mediated moments is a way to pick a site or field to analyse participatory journalism. The limitation of this approach is that it means participatory journalism is not understood on an ongoing everyday basis. However, these moments can still be representative of what happens on a regular basis.

Carrying out observation of participation, both online and offline, is fraught with ethical considerations of consent, privacy, harm and exploitation. In addition, my insider status made it difficult for my research participants to distinguish my new status as a PhD researcher from that of a member of staff. It was essential for the success of this study that I managed to negotiate unique access to the BBC Africa newsroom. However, the close relationships I had formed while employed at the BBC WS with some of the people who worked there meant that I also had to reflect on my relationships with the journalists and make sure that they consented to me carrying out my academic study. There were elements of me being a native in the research setting, as opposed to the ethnographic experience of 'going native', and other researchers in a similar situation can draw insight from my study of how to research a former workplace. It is important to keep on asking for ongoing consent so that those participants who are familiar with the researcher do not forget her new status.

My study highlights the difficulty of gaining full consent from all participants in online and offline ethnography. Apart from members of the team I was studying, it was difficult to gain consent from everybody working in the office. On the social media platforms I



studied, instead of attempting to gain consent from every individual who uploaded posts related to BBC Africa content, I went along with the view that sharing content with a broadcast organisation means that it becomes part of the public domain. In the future, a far more integrated approach should be taken to ethics, both online and offline, as the considerations are the same.

In conclusion, what makes this research different from other studies of participatory journalism is threefold: first, the integrated study of production, audiences and text at the same time; second, the mixing of qualitative observation and interviewing methods and quantitative social media analytics; and third, the unique access I managed to negotiate as a result of having been previously employed at the BBC WS.

# Chapter 4 – International Broadcasting:

## Media Power and Democratic Debate

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses my findings in relation to the first supporting research question:

*What role does participatory journalism, produced by international broadcasting, play in international democratic debate?* International broadcasters are significant players in public debate because their reach and social influence transcends national borders and due to their historic role in cultural diplomacy and soft power, as will be discussed in this chapter.

According to the BBC WS's Annual Report 2013/2014, a central objective of the broadcaster is to provide 'the most trusted relevant and high-quality international news in the world'.<sup>36</sup> At the heart of this purpose lies public diplomacy, a tool used by governments to leverage their 'soft power' resources and communicate them to foreign publics. Joseph Nye defines 'soft power' as 'the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment' (Nye 2008:94). Soft power means winning people's hearts and minds, and in this vein, international broadcasting, the BBC WS in this case, aims to use the good reputation of the BBC as a trusted international news service to bring 'benefit to the UK, the BBC and to audiences around the world' (BBCWS 2010:no page). Soft power is a form of symbolic power used in order to reinforce a social imaginary, or hegemony where certain values are taken for granted, according to Mouffe (interview with C. Mouffe:

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<sup>36</sup> They base this statement on findings from Kantar Media's brand tracking survey from November 2013.

Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006). In this chapter I demonstrate how British and journalistic values are rearticulated over time to maintain hegemonic power and influence through the BBC WS. I show that participation and the dialogic turn in broadcasting can also be seen as new forms of soft power adapted for the current new media landscape.

Hegemony is never final or total and here I look into whether social media and participatory journalism brings opportunities for audiences in Africa to disrupt power orders and create democratic spaces inclusive of more voices (interview with C. Mouffe: Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006).

Outside the UK, the continent where the BBC has the most influence in terms of audience numbers is Africa. As well as Arabic for North Africa, the BBC currently broadcasts in French for Francophone Africa, Hausa for West Africa, Swahili for East Africa and Somali for the Horn of Africa,<sup>37</sup> the Hausa, Somali and Swahili services having been introduced in 1957 (Wilkinson 1972). By far the largest coverage of Africa, however, is provided by the BBC WS's English transmissions, which cover the whole continent. The BBC WS's key markets for BBC English for Africa are Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia and Malawi, nations which have been defined as of strategic interest and importance for the BBC WS and therefore for the British government.

Those critical of Western media influence in Africa argue that the discourses of 'development' and 'democracy' that the BBC uses to position itself serve to hide other agendas, such as neoliberal hegemony and Western forms of modernisation (Louw 2011, Wasserman 2011). African scholars argue that the media are often placed within frameworks of 'media and development' and 'media and democracy' that fit the 'Global North's' image of Africa, without placing them in the context of history, colonialism and Westernised globalisation (Nyamnjoh 2010, Wasserman 2011). It is also important to

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37 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ws/languages>> accessed 3rd June 2014.

consider that 'public diplomacy' in the context of Africa could be viewed in relation to theories of cultural imperialism (Louw 2010, Abubakar 2011). Therefore, in order to understand the BBC's role in Africa, in this chapter I question whether the BBC WS acts as a guardian of freedom of information or as a postcolonial relic and a legacy of British domination in the region.

Section 4.2 opens this chapter by contextualising the role of BBC Africa participatory journalism initiatives within larger theoretical debates about international media and power. I review theories of cultural imperialism, media and development and global/local models of media influence in order to assess the power of international broadcasting in international debate. Even if the BBC WS's objective is to empower its audiences by providing free information, and so allow people to live more fulfilled lives, the organisation can be viewed from a media imperialism perspective as a colonial force exerting power over audiences in Africa. The BBC WS can also be studied as a global/local media space, where media and power flows and contra-flows between the Global North and the Global South, not least as a result of the organisation's diasporic staff and audiences. In this chapter I argue that participatory journalism calls for theories of media and international influence to be revisited in order to understand if and how new forms of communication technology can change the balance between the BBC WS and its audiences in Africa.

Section 4.3 looks back at the BBC's involvement in Africa and how it has changed over time from: a) the Empire Service; to b) African empowerment during independence, when the BBC WS helped to set up broadcasting structures on the ground; through to c) a changing and more competitive African media landscape resulting from media deregulation; d) BBC WS funding cuts and a turn to participatory journalism; and finally e) the new relevance of the BBC African services to fighting 'the information war in Africa'. This section shows how the BBC WS and its relationship with audiences in

Africa continually changes and evolves, and that in promoting a global conversation through social media, the broadcaster is attempting to remain relevant in a changing political, social, cultural and economic context through the use of symbolic power.

Section 4.4 discusses the changes in the way the BBC WS is funded and governed from a grant in aid from the Foreign Office since 1932 to the BBC Licence fee in 2014 and what this means for the organisation's editorial independence. Throughout the broadcaster's existence, the British government has tried to exert influence over the BBC WS, and impartiality is a constant negotiation between the funders, regulators, managers and the journalists. In addition, now participating audiences also add a further layer of complexity to the concepts of journalistic impartiality and balance which are the cornerstones of the BBC's journalistic values discussed further in this section. The BBC WS's independence is an on-going negotiation between its journalists, managers, funders and regulators. I argue that the BBC WS's existence has never been as threatened as it is today by changes to the funding and governance of its international services, as stated in its new operating agreement in January 2014. My research took place against the backdrop of these changes, which also had an effect on the subject of my study: the move towards more audience collaboration.

Section 4.5 outlines current changes to journalistic practices at the BBC WS, something I refer to as a dialogic turn in broadcasting in line with the dialogic turn in public deliberation that has been noted across public engagement, including digital diplomacy (Escobar 2009). Public diplomacy actors now emphasise the need to hold a two-way dialogue, both listening to and learning from audiences around the world (FCO 2011). The shift to social media and audience collaboration is being pushed by the BBC WS's senior management as a way of extending its reach and legitimising its existence and power in the future. Although in theory a global conversation allows the audience to talk back, it is also part of the BBC WS's public diplomacy goal and

therefore is also arguably a British government communications strategy aimed at gaining more influence.

Section 4.6 argues that inequality and limited access to audience participation pose challenges to the democratic qualities of participatory journalism. The majority of those who engage with the BBC African services on social media forums either do not live in Africa or are urban crowdsourced elites, a concept defined later in this chapter. The BBC African services thus do not extend their reach to audiences who are information poor, but rather target small groups of digitally enabled and powerful elites online. If poor online access to BBC Africa continues, the role of international broadcasting in fostering democratic debate via social media in Africa will remain limited. Even if access were to become more widely available, this would not necessarily mean that participatory journalism would provide more democratic forms of debate. Journalistic practices still need to change, and debates need to be relevant and trusted by audiences in Africa.

This chapter concludes that it is important not to take for granted that an organisation's vision of a global conversation necessarily leads to more democratic forms of international debate. Instead, the power and influence of global media must be considered when analysing the role played by international broadcasting in democratic debate in Africa and the rest of the world. Participatory journalism is where the global (the international broadcaster) meets the local (audiences in Africa), producing new ways of writing stories. However, I argue that it is important not to assume that participatory journalism is necessarily more democratic than traditional journalism. Inequality, particularly when it comes to accessing to new technology, means cultural imperialism, and uneven power flows in international communications are still relevant. In order to allow audiences to collaborate over news, journalistic practices need to

change to allow more diverse voices and stories to be heard. These practices will be studied in chapters 5 and 6.

## **4.2 Cultural Imperialism, media development and global/local models of international media influence**

With the aim of proposing a way to contextualise the role of BBC Africa's participatory journalism within debates about international media, power and democracy, this section discusses cultural imperialism, media development and global/local models of media influence. This thesis focuses on how participation allows audiences to talk back, and therefore potentially challenges old notions of media power and international influence.

The role of International media in developing countries is usually studied through three distinct theoretical lenses: a) cultural imperialism, where western culture is seen to dominate and *exert power over* audiences; b) media and development, where media can be used for *empowerment* – a tool for social, economic and political change; and c) global/local models, which have a more complex conception of media power working in both local and global directions – i.e. the global media may exercise power but local audiences appropriate media content in creative ways (Gillespie 2005). I argue here that all three theoretical frameworks are important in understanding the role played by the BBC African services in democratic debate in Africa, as I will demonstrate in this chapter. The following section further explains these frameworks of media and international power and how they are applied to this study in order to answer my research question.

First, cultural and media imperialism is generally defined as cultural domination and an uneven flow of media influence from the Global North to the Global South (Galtung and Ruge 1965, Katz and Wedell 1977, Guback, Varis et al. 1982, Golding and Harris 1997, Tomlinson 2001). In practice this means that the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few media conglomerates in the Global North means that

very little media shown in Africa is culturally relevant to the domestic setting, resulting in issues of democratic deliberation (Nyamnjoh 2010). By relevant I mean a lack of representation of people who live in Africa's various countries and specific issues relating to their lives.

The concept of cultural imperialism has been criticised both for its reductive view of African audiences as passive victims and because it neglects contra flows and the appropriation of foreign content by active audiences (Nyamnjoh 2010, Wasserman 2010). Audience research studies suggest that although they value the BBC's quality of reporting, listeners from northern Nigeria view the BBC WS's role in Africa as a tool used to spread Western ideology and represent the Muslim world and Africa in a negative light (Abubakar 2011).

Although the creative appropriation of foreign content and resistance to dominant discourses in Africa is not new, ICTs are seen to play a significant role in fostering resistance, with active uses of new media shaping contra flows and cultural hybridisation (Thussu 2007, Kraidy and Murphy 2008). Participatory journalism therefore calls for a consideration of the reversed flow of media content, enabled by new media and citizen journalism for example, which points out the tension between global and local flows of content.

Thus, second, global/local models of international media influence stress a two way flow of influence, where 'the global (is) in the local and the local is in the global' (Sreberny-Mohammadi 2002:341). African audience studies has well documented how people in Africa resist the dominant discourses from the Global North by adopting local 'popular' and 'small media', and now social media (Spitulnik 2003: 178, Nyamnjoh 2010). Examples of this type of content are blogs, pop songs, jokes, graffiti, flyers, audiocassettes, video and increasingly the internet and social media controlled by individuals and small groups. On the one hand, in Africa this form of communication has



often been seen as a catalyst for social change and a move towards democratisation (Banda, Mudhai et al. 2009). However, a more pessimistic outlook on small media technology is offered by Avle (2011), who points out that the internet is not a pluralistic space in an egalitarian sense, because the vast majority of those who participate are new cultural elites with access to literacy, capital and technology (Avle 2011). Despite new media and because of the remaining inequalities in the distribution and representation of African voices in international media, I argue that cultural imperialism is still relevant in an African context and that media and democracy need to be critically assessed through the lens of the political economy of access to ICTs.

Despite the uneven distribution of media power between the Global North and South, it is evident to me that media influence does not flow in straightforward ways. One example of media contra flows which is important to consider for this study is the now socially and technologically connected and diverse African diaspora. The BBC WS has previously been studied as a diasporic contact zone (Gillespie, Mackay et al. 2011), and this theoretical framework is important for understanding the complex set of relationships, power and contraflows ingrained in participatory journalism at the BBC. Global/local models of media power are thus useful, as those who can use new media, including BBC Africa digital services, often reside outside Africa. My study shows that nearly 45% of audiences who commented on BBC Africa Debate on Twitter did so from outside Africa: from the USA, the UK and other parts of Europe. This largely middle class and digitally enabled diaspora is significant in promoting development and culture from the Global North in Africa (Louw 2010). The relevance of a diasporic perspective in relation to democratic debate at the BBC African services is not only significant with relation to audiences, but also because the BBC African producers working at Bush House may also be defined as diasporas (Baumann and Gillespie 2007). Many of those who work for the BBC African services are dissidents or political refugees, although there are also students and economic migrants.

Third, while global/local models of media power play down the media's influence *over* audiences, media for development on the other hand is produced and transmitted with the purpose of changing the content of the social world and the behaviour of audiences (Skuse, Gillespie et al. 2011). The BBC WS pursues a development agenda in two separate ways. Firstly, the overall objective of the BBC WS is to provide information and thus enable people to make sense of their world and live more fulfilled lives as a result (BBCWS 2011). This objective goes hand in hand with the idea that free media empowers citizens by building public consensus, an ideal that has been at the root of the BBC WS's efforts in Africa since its conception. Secondly, BBC Media Action, the BBC WS's charitable arm, merges education with entertainment in pursuit of specific development outcomes such as improved nutrition, conflict reduction and gender equality (Skuse, Gillespie et al. 2011). The quote from BBC Media Action's website below explains its key objectives:

Media and communication can inform, connect and empower. They can help people bring about lasting change in their lives. We use mass media and outreach to achieve impact at scale. Our organisation has special expertise in working in fragile and conflict-affected societies where political, security or other factors mean that media is one of the few options available to reach and engage marginalised groups. We work across four themes: Governance, Health, Resilience and Humanitarian response (BBC Media Action 2016).<sup>38</sup>

The link between free media and empowerment has been questioned in previous research (Scott 2014) because development efforts do not necessarily provide a straightforward outcome for media action. In addition, disseminating information can only make a difference if the right people have access to the right information at the right time. It is also important that audiences trust that information and are able to act on

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38 BBC Media Action website <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/what-we-do>> Accessed 30th October 2016.

the advice (Scott 2014). For example, there is no point in telling people to eat more vegetables if they are unable to grow or buy any. Media for development has also been criticised for imposing dominant development messaging and neo-liberal agendas on information-poor audiences from the Global South (Louw 2011, Skuse 2011). The BBC WS spreads information about health and education, whilst also promoting British values abroad, which makes their agenda questionable. I therefore study the complex relationships between the BBC WS and its audiences rather than taking empowerment for granted as an effect of participatory journalism. I argue that the global conversation discussed later in this chapter needs to be assessed while keeping in mind the BBC WS's position, broadcasting from the Global North to Africa.

In addition to the mass media's role in development, in recent years ICTs have been increasingly seen as having the power to change lives in developing countries by using mobile phones to promote flood safety or transparency in local government. ICTs can also enable audiences to talk back to broadcasters, ensuring citizens' right to freedom of expression (Scott 2009). Later in this chapter I discuss the pitfalls of assuming that ICTs can affect egalitarian shifts, as lack of access and online power inequalities remain. However, I also argue that with the right practices in place there are opportunities for journalism to allow for influence from new actors to take part in international discourse.

In the next section, I tell the story of the BBC WS's role in Africa since 1948 in order to show how its power and influence over audiences is constantly changing, depending on the geopolitical agenda of the time and how the global conversation is part of it.

### **4.3 BBC WS' s influence in Africa - a historical perspective**

The BBC WS was founded in 1932 as the Empire Service with the mission of providing information to Britons posted around the foreign dominions. World War II brought a

change of name and a change of mission, and in 1939 it became the Overseas Service, while its programme staff for non-domestic output rose from 103 in 1939 to 1,472 in 1941 (BBCNews 2007). The new push for overseas broadcasting from the BBC provided war-torn Europe and the rest of the world with 'trustworthy' information that would reflect well on Britain and help the war effort. Since then, the BBC WS has been an important player in Britain's public diplomacy strategy.

It was evident from as early as 1936 that the British government and the Colonial Office wanted to use broadcasting to both influence and empower people in Africa (Armour 1984). However, the BBC's involvement in Africa began properly after the Second World War in 1948, around the time that the first wave of African independence began. The British government was worried about the spread of communism and African independence, and broadcasting was not only seen as a way to stop unwanted political developments, but also as essential for building democratic governments in Africa (Armour 1984). Broadcasting was even seen as able to give political power to every person and prevent civil unrest, as in the extract below from the Watson Report, produced after a spate of civil unrest in the Gold Coast in 1948 and which tried to draw attention to the value of broadcasting in 'correcting false impressions and rumours in times of civil disturbance':

The Constitution and Government of the country must be so reshaped as to give every African of ability an opportunity to govern the country, so as not only to gain experience but also to experience political power. We are firmly of opinion that anything less than this will only stimulate national unrest<sup>39</sup> (Armour 1984:363).

Although broadcasting was mainly seen as a tool for information and education, it was also thought that entertainment was important for African audiences. H. Franklin, then

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<sup>39</sup> Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances in the Gold Coast Report (Chairman, Aiken Watson).

Information Officer at the Colonial Office and instrumental in pushing for broadcasting development in Africa, was convinced that in the absence of artificial light, radio entertainment would be welcome in most African homes.

'Folklore, riddles, plays and "simple sciences"' were seen as relevant for the illiterate: 'It could be an important medium for mass literacy and education but it must include a considerable amount of entertainment' (Armour 1984:368).

The BBC would play an important part in providing radio to Africa, although its role was at first seen as temporary.

At first, broadcasting was a 'centre out' activity, with the BBC providing programmes thought relevant to an African audience. However, it was never the idea for the BBC WS to be the principle provider of broadcasting in Africa for the foreseeable future. A few years before the BBC became formally involved in broadcasting to Africa, the Plymouth Committee explored Britain's role in broadcasting to the Empire, pointing out that the Empire Service (later the BBC WS) should not in future serve the indigenous populations in Africa, but instead the BBC would only broadcast temporarily, for five years or so, then hand over to the colonial governments in Africa (Wilkinson 1972, Armour 1984). Despite the endorsement of this objective by the government and the Colonial Office, the BBC played an instrumental role in setting up and running broadcasting operations in Africa between the 1940s and 1970s (Wilkinson 1972). Its influence extended far beyond five years, and 70 years later the BBC still attracts millions of listeners and thousands of online users from Africa.

The BBC's involvement in the early development of African broadcasting was threefold. First, the BBC contributed on behalf of the Colonial Office to technical and broadcasting expertise in Africa. Second, BBC staff on secondment in Africa provided professional training for African broadcasters, while African broadcasters attended training courses in the UK. Several hundred BBC staff worked in Africa at different

times, and over 2000 African broadcasters came to the UK for training and experience. Finally, the BBC also produced programmes for Africa through the BBC Overseas Services (Wilkinson 1972).

The role of a BBC manager in setting up the Nigerian Broadcasting Service is described in the quote below from a 1972 speech by the then head of the BBC African services, J. F. Wilkinson. Wilkinson describes the BBC's role and sets out the objective of handing the running of the services back to Nigerian broadcasters:

May I now refer in some detail to the early development of broadcasting in Nigeria, under Tom Chalmers, who has probably done as much for broadcasting in black Africa as anyone from the BBC? He later became the Director-General of Radio Tanzania and more recently has travelled all over the world as a BBC consultant on a wide field of projects and problems. Although on an unusually large scale, the development of broadcasting in Nigeria was typical of development in most Anglophone African countries in the 1950s and early 1960s. In 1950 there was very little in the way of a transmitted radio service in Nigeria. In some of the big townships there were local radio services with a receiving station and wired distribution to box loudspeakers relaying for instance 'Calling West Africa' and the BBC's General Overseas Service. There were also local studios in these centres where simple talks of an educational or local interest could be produced. The programmes were run by the government Public Relations Department, while Posts and Telegraphs were responsible for the technical side. Though the staff of both departments had made the most of their very slender resources, they were not in a position to supply the professionalism or the co-ordinated driving force needed to

create a new broadcasting service. The task before Tom Chalmers then was to create a Nigerian broadcasting service run by Nigerians for Nigerians. This meant the purchase of a vast quantity of studio and transmitting equipment, the training of staff and the rapid development of programme services for all parts of Nigeria. He obtained the services of experienced engineers and programme staff from the BBC and elsewhere, recruited potential broadcasters in Nigeria itself, took over the broadcasting responsibilities of the PRO and P & T Departments – including Nigerian staff that they themselves had recruited and trained – and the Nigerian Broadcasting Service was created. Between 1950 and 1962 nearly 60 BBC staff was seconded to the NBC but it was clearly understood from the start that the objective was the complete Nigerianization of all departments as rapidly as possible. In fact the task was virtually completed by the early 1960s when the NBC had a total staff of over 2,000. This was no small achievement, particularly by the Nigerian broadcasters themselves, who took tremendous responsibilities very quickly and who have since had to face very great pressures. (Wilkinson 1972:179-180).

BBC broadcasters had opinions about what would be of interest to or important for African audiences from an educational point of view, and they saw the BBC and Britain as the only organisation and nation that could provide this content for Africa. For example, programmes tried to encourage interest in the arts, and at one time most African poets had contributed to 'West African Voices', which began in 1948, or its successor 'Writers' Club', which covered the whole continent. Other arts programmes were 'The Arts and Africa' and the monthly 30-minute radio drama 'African Theatre'. In education, programmes such as 'University Report' linked African and other universities together through reports on research projects, conferences, teaching methods and

academic administration. 'Men and Their Money' targeted African businessmen, 'Break for Women' was for African women listeners and 'This Sporting Life' was the only pan-African sports programme in existence in the 1970s. The first participatory programme for Africa, 'Postmark Africa', started long before the invention of online forums and social media, with African listeners sending in their questions on all manner of subjects and receiving expert answers. The quote below from the then director of BBC African services describes the aims of African programmes:

If there is a common aim in all these programmes, it is to widen the horizons and interests of our listeners in Africa wherever they may be and to provide a service for them that perhaps only the BBC and this country can provide (Wilkinson 1972).

Due to cuts in funding, the BBC African services today mostly provide news bulletins and current affairs programmes, and the whole organisation has moved away from culture, arts and radio drama (fieldnotes based on observations at the BBC WS between January 2011 and May 2013). However, there has been an increased focus on audience participation, mostly via social media, as shown in chapters 5 and 6.

Despite the BBC's dominance as the most popular international broadcaster in the region (BBCWS 2013/2014), its role in Africa is diminishing, with audience figures in the continent dropping as a result of technological shifts in radio listening and increased local competition. The BBC WS's audience figure is calculated from national surveys commissioned by the BBC WS's audience research team in 20 to 30 countries or regions each year, as well as web and mobile data collected from the BBC's own web analytics systems (Wilding 2011).<sup>40</sup> During my fieldwork, the global weekly audience figure fluctuated between 188 million in 2009, 180 million in 2010, 166 million in 2011, back up to 180 million in 2012 and up to a record 192m people in 2013. As well as the fluctuation caused by surveying different countries each year, there was also a

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<sup>40</sup> I worked at the BBC WS in the audience research team from 2006 to 2009 and was involved in putting together the global audience figure.



significant drop in shortwave listening during these years, particularly in India and Africa, with the shortwave radio audience in Nigeria dropping by 2.9 million between 2010 and 2011 for example. The other overarching trend is that, whilst radio is declining, the online, mobile and TV audience is increasing. For example, visitors to BBC mobile sites in Nigeria increased by over 250% in 2013 from the previous year.<sup>41</sup> The BBC WS provides TV broadcasts in a limited number of languages, and it was not until 2012 that the BBC African services received funding to produce a one hour TV version of the long running radio show *Focus on Africa*.

Africa is now a competitive broadcasting landscape with thousands of local radio stations, and so the BBC is losing audience share. The main reason for the changing media landscape is market liberalisation and the move away from radio listening towards TV and mobile internet (Myers 2008). In order to meet demand for TV content, recent changes in funding priorities have seen the BBC move towards making TV programmes for Africa. As early as 1972, J. F. Wilkinson, then head of the service, argued that TV was the next medium for Africa, but it was not until 18<sup>th</sup> June 2012 that the BBC broadcast its first TV programme for Africa – Focus on Africa. As resources are shifted to much more expensive TV production, budgets for radio are declining. The move from radio to TV is obviously not the only technological shift taking place in Africa at the moment: far more disruptive is internet-enabled mobile technology.

Even before the internet and social media provided interactive features for participation, the BBC WS allowed audiences in Africa to participate, mainly through audience letters to programmes such as the above-mentioned Postmark and later via radio phone-in programmes. 'Participation is not new, it is intrinsic to our remit', says the managing editor of BBC Africa, pointing out that 'as far as audience participation is concerned, BBC Africa has a long history that dates back to even before the phone-in programme

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41 Press Release BBC WS Global Audience Estimate 2013  
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2013/global-audience-estimate.html>> accessed 12th June 2014.

Africa Have Your Say (AHYS), which launched over 10 years ago' (fieldnotes, interview with senior manager, 12th June 2012). The quote below explains how audience letters to the radio programme Network Africa were received and read out on air:

Audience Participation at the BBC African Service is a culture as old as the Network Africa Programme. Every morning, the presenters read out letters that had come via snail mail from all corners of Africa as part of the news and current affairs broadcast. It was part of a producer's job to go through the mail bag and select five to six letters, read them, re-write them, voice them, and when the night team came in to work their first job was also to record letters. So the idea that the audience should be part of what we do is not new! (Fieldnotes, interview with senior manager, 12th June 2012)

Reading out letters of course only gave a limited part of the audience the opportunity to participate. As mentioned in the quote, typically five to six letters were selected from the pile of contributions and voiced by the presenter in each programme.

The BBC African services were the first BBC WS department to provide a radio phone-in programme. The programme, called Africa Have Your Say (AHYS), was broadcast three times a week<sup>42</sup> and covered a wide range of topics deemed relevant for a Pan-African audience, including drug abuse, political corruption, sexuality and gender.

AHYS provided an opportunity for audiences in Africa with access to a phone line to have a say by calling and talking to producers. As with audience letter shows, the time and number of calls were limited by the length of the programme, and the presenters and producers picked the best callers. Radio phone-in programmes have previously been described as contributing to the public sphere (Hutchby 2001) by allowing the public to have a say. However, scholars have also shown that gatekeeping functions within such programmes hinder equal participation, as journalists only allow contributions from articulate audiences with the most important points to make, in line

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<sup>42</sup> The AHYS programme was discontinued in August 2012. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/africahaveyoursay>> Accessed 17th April 2016.

with their professional criteria of good journalism (Leurdijk 1997, Dori-Hacohen 2012).

It can be argued, then, that the power balance in AHYS was still heavily skewed towards the producers. Despite the popularity of AHYS with audiences, BBC management discontinued the programme in October 2011, a decision resulting directly from the British government's spending review and the 16% budget reduction which forced BBC Africa and other departments across the BBC WS to cut services (fieldnotes Oct 2011).

Alongside radio-phone-in shows, during the 2000s audiences were also able to interact with BBC content via the *Have Your Say* (HYS) internet forums, hosted on BBC websites and moderated by BBC editors. These forums were started in 2005 and discontinued in 2011, forming a relatively minor chapter in the history of participation at the BBC WS. Due to professional pre-moderation, journalistic control was high and audience power low on these online forums (Andersson, Gillespie et al. 2010, Gillespie, Herbert et al. 2010), meaning that forum moderators (BBC journalists) read through all comments, only allowing appropriate comments to be published. The main concern of the BBC WS moderators was to make sure that all comments were verified, and therefore true, and that abusive content, or any contribution that could cause offense to other people through belligerent or insulting language, was removed (Gillespie, Herbert et al. 2010). In some cases, when the moderators did not have time to read through all the comments sent to the forum, only a handful of contributions were published on the website. This strict control of audience comments was a limiting factor for the participatory quality of the HYS forums and contributed to the restricted impact audience contributions had on the overall news agenda at that time.

A 2007 study of the online forum *World Have Your Say* (WHYS) showed that audience participation in the forum had no significant effect on the BBC WS's news agenda or its traditional news frames (Herbert and Black 2007). Instead, audience debates existed

alongside but separate to usual news coverage, without having much impact on overall news reporting. According to the only previous academic study to be carried out on the BBC Africa HYS forum, the discussions taking place were created to fit into traditional African news frames (Ogunyemi 2011). The way questions were asked did not allow enough room for the debate to diverge from the topic selected by the BBC producers. In comparison to the HYS forums, social media now allow audiences to discuss topics with the BBC WS straight away on third party sites such as Facebook and Twitter, rather than contributions having to go through BBC pre-moderation. This has resulted in an exponential increase in BBC-led participatory initiatives, encouraged by BBC management.

Participatory journalism via social media is thus the latest development in audience management at the BBC African services, with the BBC WS constantly changing and shifting its practices to fit the political agenda of the times. The move towards participation coincides with a wider political change in public engagement at the beginning of the 2000s, which I will explain in Section 4.5. First, however, I will explain the relationship between the BBC WS and its main government stakeholder, the FCO.

#### **4.4 The BBC WS' s impartiality and democratic values**

The BBC World Service's June 2013 operating licence states that the overarching journalism value to which the BBC WS aspires is to provide 'accurate, impartial and independent content'. The following section looks at how independent the BBC WS has been from the British government over the years, and the implications this has had for BBC journalism.

The BBC WS has recently undergone major changes to its funding structures, and since April 2014 it has been funded by the British TV licence fee. This marks a great departure in the history of the BBC WS, which since 1947 has been funded separately

from the rest of the BBC, paid for by a Foreign Office grant-in-aid. This separate funding was put in place in order to make sure that the BBC's financial arrangements would not intrude on the freedom of the BBC WS (Webb 2008). Now that the budget of the BBC WS has been put together with the rest of the organisation, these issues will arise again. However, despite the recent changes in funding, the aim and values of the BBC WS remain largely the same, at least in principle. Under the previous funding arrangements, the 2005 Broadcast Agreement<sup>43</sup> protected the BBC's independence from the FCO, so although the FCO provided funding, it could not give the BBC WS directives on what to broadcast. The intent of funding the service rather than directly controlling broadcast output was for the BBC to give Britain a reputation for providing trusted and impartial news services (Cowan and Cull 2008). However, the relationship between the BBC WS and the FCO and the FCO's influence over the BBC WS has always shifted and developed depending on the political, cultural, economic and practical context (Webb 2008).

In 1946, when grant-in-aid funding was established, a white paper on broadcasting policy stated that:

The BBC would remain independent in the preparation of programmes for overseas audiences, though it should obtain from government departments concerned such information about conditions in these countries and the policies of His Majesty's Government toward them as will permit it to plan its programmes in the national interest (Webb 2008:559).

This means at least in principle that the BBC has autonomy in terms of what to broadcast, as long as it is not damaging to Britain. According to the BBC's 1947 royal charter, 'guidance' is part of the government's remit, but advising on the content and

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<sup>43</sup> BBC Broadcast Agreement, 2005  
<[http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/WS\\_Broadcasting\\_Agreement02FINAL.pdf](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/WS_Broadcasting_Agreement02FINAL.pdf)> Accessed 12th June 2014.

style of a broadcast is not. In addition, the charter contains requirements which give the government the right to decide which languages the BBC WS should broadcast in and for how long (Webb 2008). This final say on broadcast platforms remains the same today, and the FCO had to approve the closure of services in 2005 and 2012 and the establishment of new TV stations in 2008 and 2012, for example.

There are examples of geopolitics putting pressure on the relationship between Bush House – the home of overseas broadcasting – and Whitehall – the home of the UK Government – especially during the Cold War. During the early years of the Cold War, the FCO felt that the BBC was not toeing the anti-communist line hard enough (Webb 2008). It soon became clear that BBC WS journalists were being forced to apply different treatment to their broadcasts to the Soviet bloc compared to those to other countries, and at some points their broadcasts could even be viewed as political warfare aimed at antagonising the communist project (Webb 2008). It is interesting to note that the principles of the broadcasting policy were challenged in order to pursue cold war objectives so soon after they were set out in 1946.

However, a few years later, by the mid-1950s, BBC WS journalists had settled into journalistic routines and a sense of professionalism, and FCO influence was no longer so welcome. An example of direct pressure from the FCO in October 1956, cited in (Webb 2008:563) is illustrated in the quote below:

The hapless Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anthony Nutting, applied what might be called the 'Kirkpatrick principle' to relations with the BBC. At a meeting with Jacob, he informed the Director-General of the government's belief that in recent months overseas broadcasting had not 'given value for money' and that, consequently, it intended to cut £1 million, around 20%, from the External Service's budget. In addition, a Foreign Office Liaison Officer, i.e. censor, would

be installed in Bush House to 'advise the BBC on the content and direction of the overseas programmes.

This was at the time of the Suez crisis in 1956, which is perhaps the most critical moment when the BBC WS's editorial independence was put to the test, this time in the public eye. The BBC, as cited in (Webb 2008:564), sees this as the moment when it defied government censorship by facing down a 'Government threat to its freedom to report dissent'. However, in retrospect, actual disagreements were only over small divergences with BBC journalists over Whitehall policy, and in actual fact the argument was more about the principle of BBC editorial independence and what it means to broadcast in the interest of the nation. Webb (2008) discusses the real significance of BBC and FCO relations during this time and how this influenced the BBC WS we have today:

The real significance of Bush House's relations with Whitehall in this period lies not just in the constitutional settlement arrived at and its application in various circumstances, but in the sense of a constitutional duty that clearly emerges from the wider context of the External Services' work. It was this sense of duty that allowed the BBC to robustly fight the government on issues of editorial independence where the outcome was evaluated as damaging to Britain's long-term interests (as opposed to those of the government's) while at the same time allowing for the provision of off-mike assistance such as resources, advice and training. What this helps identify is an institutional sense of diplomatic, political and cultural guardianship towards the nation's long-term interests that became an essential part of the External Services' corporate mind set and which has since

become an integral part of the public service ecology of overseas broadcasting (Webb 2008:566).

The role of the BBC WS as a tool of diplomacy or a potential mouthpiece for the British government is important when analysing the role played by the broadcaster in Africa. The BBC WS's editorial independence is an ongoing project of negotiation over economic resources, best practice and governance. Today, the BBC WS is protected by an operating agreement with the BBC established on January 30<sup>th</sup> 2014, and like the rest of the BBC, it is also established under a royal charter. The charter explicitly states that the BBC is editorially independent.<sup>44</sup> Despite the charter agreement, the BBC WS's independence has perhaps never been as threatened as it was during the time of my fieldwork, with changes to its funding and governance having implications for its participatory strategy.

However, the new funding and governance of the BBC WS creates uncertainties about its future role. In recent report named 'The Future of The BBC WS', the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee outlines its worries resulting from the new funding structure (Foreign-Affairs-Committee 2014). These doubts relate to funding shortages, governance, the value of the BBC as perceived by the British public and the future role of the BBC WS in public diplomacy. These issues are summarised below.

First, the report points out that the BBC WS's future funding is not secure. Beyond the 2016-2017 charter, there is no guarantee that funding will be sustained. In addition, no increase in the UK TV Licence fee has been made in order to cover the BBC WS's £245 million budget. This is at a time when the BBC needs to save £700 million overall over the four-year period from 2013 to 2017. What does this mean for the BBC WS's budget?

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<sup>44</sup> BBC Royal Charter 1 January 2007 – 31 December 2016 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldserviceradio/help>> Accessed 15th December 2016.



In terms of governance, there are concerns that the director of Global News (including the BBC WS) does not sit on the BBC's Executive Board, nor does he sit on the Management Board, which is responsible for managing pan-BBC issues delegated to it from the Executive Board (Foreign-Affairs-Committee 2014). This means that in terms of governance, the BBC WS has less say than other news divisions in the strategic direction.

As a licence fee funded service, the BBC WS is accountable to the British public. The integration of the BBC WS with the BBC will probably eventually lead to the public and the media being more questioning about the value of the BBC WS in relation to domestic services (Foreign-Affairs-Committee 2014). The chairman of the trust, Lord Patten, has cited evidence from polls which suggest that the British public give the BBC WS 'a high rating' and recognise its role in 'explaining this country to the world, and the reverse' (2011). However, when it comes to the closure of domestic services in order to serve African listeners, will the British public be sympathetic? Director of television Danny Cohen has mentioned that the closure of BBC Three as a TV service and its move online was done partly to cover the BBC WS's £245 million budget.<sup>45</sup>

The relationship between the FCO and the BBC WS might change as a result of the new funding structure. FCO representatives and BBC WS management previously met once each quarter to discuss foreign diplomacy strategies. While the new funding structure might remove past suspicions that the BBC WS is run by the FCO, the FCO relies on the BBC WS as a tool for soft power and therefore, according to the (Foreign-Affairs-Committee 2014), it would not serve the UK's interest for 'the BBC to lose sight of the priorities of the FCO'. Hence, the BBC WS's role in public diplomacy is threatened, and if the BBC WS does not exercise 'soft power', what is it for?

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<sup>45</sup> BBC press release <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2014/bbc-three-tv-closure.html>> accessed 12th June 2015.

My research makes it evident that these changes to the BBC WS's management have resulted in insecurity, impacting not only on atmosphere but also on working practices. The period of my study, January 2011 to May 2013, was a time of great upheaval and change for the BBC WS and the individuals who work there, with significant consequences for audience participation and its role in the organisation. I have summarised these changes in the following paragraphs.

*New Leadership* – In 2009 Peter Horrocks took over the directorship of BBC Global News (of which BBC WS is an integral part), announcing the end of 'fortress journalism' (Horrocks 2009). Amongst other things, this meant creating a media organisation fit for the digital age and becoming more collaborative with the audience in the production of news stories.

One of the first statements made by Horrocks when he took up the post in February 2010 was that BBC news journalists must make better use of social media and become more collaborative with the audience in producing news stories:

There's no excuse for failing to think about this and to throw yourself into it. If you don't like it, or you think that level of change or that different way of working isn't right for me, then go out and do something else, because it's going to happen, you're not going to be able to stop it....This isn't just a kind of fad from someone who's an enthusiast of technology. I'm afraid you're not doing your job if you can't do those things. It's not discretionary (Ariel<sup>46</sup> 9<sup>th</sup> Feb 2010:2)

Horrocks urged all staff working in BBC Global News to be prepared to pick up social media skills and leave a programme-based mind-set behind. His vision of how the organisation had to change was very much present in the general culture and mood at

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<sup>46</sup> The BBC's internal staff newspaper.

the department at the time. After managing the organisation through major shifts and funding cuts, Horrocks left in April 2014.

*Government Spending Review 2010* – Horrocks' most enduring legacy is perhaps the fact that that he had to see the organisation through the largest funding cuts since it was established, as a result of the UK government's major spending review in October 2010. This meant that as of April 2014, and as part of negotiations for a six-year term for the overall BBC licence fee, the BBC World Service would move from being supported by a grant-in-aid from the Foreign Office to being funded from the UK licence fee. In addition to this, a more immediate change was that BBC WS funding was cut by 16% in real terms over the four year period until April 2014, resulting in cuts to both services and staff (Horrocks 2010).

*Move to Broadcasting House* – during the fieldwork period, the BBC World Service moved from Bush House, its home since 1941, to Broadcasting House, home of the BBC's domestic news services and multimedia newsroom. The move marked a great departure in the history of the organisation, and in a speech to staff on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2010, which I attended, Peter Horrocks stated that he believed the move would enable great change and allow the BBC WS to revolutionise its work in terms of collaboration and creativity:

In 2012, when we move to the new building in Broadcasting House, we will be in the home of the world's strongest journalism and greatest news brand. There we will also be able to invent a whole new way of working that will deliver enormous efficiencies as well as creative benefits. Already we are starting to see the fruits of that approach through the greater level of collaboration we have been encouraging (Horrocks 2010:6-7).

However, despite this positive outline of the future, a great many staff were worried about the move to broadcasting house, which would mean that the BBC WS was to be mixed in with the overall BBC production machine. In addition, the announcement of a move to licence fee funding made staff feel that this was the end of the BBC WS.

*Preparing for licence fee take over* – BBC World Service staff did not know what would happen to funding once the BBC World Service was absorbed into the licence fee in April 2014. Although both Horrocks and then leader of the BBC Mark Thompson assured the BBC WS that it would continue to receive funding and not suffer any further cuts beyond April 2014, at the time of my fieldwork staff did not feel reassured and there was a great deal of uncertainty as a result.

My research took place against the backdrop of these seismic changes to the BBC World Service and therefore also to the BBC African services. It is important to note this organisational context, because I believe it had an effect on the push for new technology and audience collaboration as part of news reporting. Attracting new audiences, using new technology, and being innovative with small budgets meant that participatory journalism almost became a strategy to survive the cuts. In addition, the move towards the global conversation as an objective reflected a wider shift in Britain's foreign engagement policy at the time, showing the close link between the soft power agendas of the government and the BBC WS. The role of the global conversation as a tool for public engagement with foreign publics is discussed in the next section.

#### **4.5 BBC WS – A dialogic turn in broadcasting**

I argue that at the time of my research international broadcasting was going through a dialogic turn, moving from a transmission model to a dialogic model, in line with the overall dialogic turn in public engagement policy seen in public institutions across the world and in the UK (Escobar 2011; Escobar 2010). The objective of fostering a global

conversation was a move away from the idea that broadcasting has influence 'over' audiences and towards a conception of the BBC WS as a guiding and enabling force, as expressed in its 2010 objectives:

To connect and engage audiences by facilitating an informed and intelligent dialogue – a global conversation – which transcends international borders and cultural divides, giving audiences opportunities to create, publish and share their views and stories. To enable people, by so doing, to make sense of their increasingly complex world and, thus empowered, lead more fulfilling lives (BBCWS 2010:no page).

Section 4.4 has shown how the BBC WS was forced to make substantive cost savings, with social media being a way for services to reach out to new audiences despite cuts to broadcasting services. Thus, the aim of fostering a global conversation may be seen as a way to meet an increasingly competitive media market and austerity measures in the UK by attempting to counter falling audience numbers and boost audience engagement. However, this section also shows that the move towards social media participation at the BBC WS came at the same time as wider political changes involving a dialogic approach to public engagement in the UK and abroad. Therefore, the global conversation was also a way to meet the need to move in line with the FCO's own dialogic turn, with new diplomacy emphasising the need to 'hold a two-way dialogue, listening to and learning from audiences around the world' (FCO 2011:no page).

While the BBC WS was moving towards new forms of participation, foreign diplomacy actors like the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) also started using social media for digital diplomacy activities. At the time, social media and citizen journalism were being credited with starting revolutions and being pivotal to political change. Although internet sceptics were questioning the powers attributed to the net (Morozov

2011), government agencies were developing digital strategies and attempting to engage directly with the public via digital diplomacy. The shift the BBC WS and other political agencies were undergoing was related to the unsettling of power and influence, and as a result they needed to respond and foster relationships with different networks (Allen 2009) rather than exerting power from a central point, as had been the case with the BBC WS in the past. The BBC African services needed to make better use of their diasporic staff and local connections, fostering relationships rather than transmitting information from a British point of view.

According to its previous head of strategy, the role of the BBC WS in democratic debate is to provide a platform for an open public debate. Rather than diplomats speaking directly to the public, the BBC WS's reputation as impartial can gain far more soft power than individual government agents can:

Digital diplomacy is promising more than it delivers, the BBC WS provides better channels for an open public debate than if diplomats are talking directly to the public (interview with Mark Bunting – Head of Strategy, BBC WS 2011).

According to Bunting, despite there now being an option for diplomats to talk to audiences directly, there is still a role for an international news service with a reputation for impartiality. If fostering a dialogue is just a pre-set communications strategy for public diplomacy and public relations, it is not a dialogue because it is trying to get a message across and therefore it is not seeking mutuality, as discussed in Chapter 2. An important question in this context is how public diplomacy broadcasts approach their audiences: 'do they merely talk about, talk at, or indeed talk with their listeners' (Zöllner 2006: 100), or alternatively, do they employ dialogues in front of their audience? If journalists use social media merely as another broadcast platform, no participation and no democratic debate takes place. According to the BBC WS's tradition of impartial

news provision, its role is to provide a platform for public debate rather than to approach audiences with particular agendas. This could be aligned with fostering a global conversation, as long as there is mutuality and respectful listening, as is discussed further in Chapter 6.

Although the global conversation is clearly stated as one of the organisation's objectives, my observations at the BBC WS show that the concept is more a matter of management speak than something embraced by the journalists themselves, who never referred to their work as 'fostering a global conversation'. Instead, on a day-to-day basis, journalists think about the opportunities provided by social media and audience participation quite differently. The reasons the BBC Africa journalists I interviewed gave for using social media were:

To increase reach and engage audiences – to journalists, engagement often means encouraging the audience to like (on Facebook), re-tweet (on Twitter) and comment on BBC published content.

To publish existing content in new forms and on new platforms and to publish new content that does not have an outlet. There have been many cuts and the number of hours of radio broadcast reduced, while the number of managed webpages has decreased. Journalists often have to fight to get their stories out on BBC platforms. The BBC African services have had particular problems in getting space on BBC English language websites, and social media is a way of putting content in front of audiences without having to go through BBC bureaucracy.

To gather content to read out on air or include on the website. By engaging audiences on social media, journalists find content for their stories. This is almost like audience vox-pops from around the world without having to travel to the location with a microphone or camera (fieldnotes 21<sup>st</sup> March 2011, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012 & 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012).

None of the reasons mentioned above are particularly about handing the power of storytelling over to audiences; instead the objectives are more about fulfilling the journalistic objectives of getting one's stories out in front of audiences and extending the reach of BBC content. The journalists want to reach out to audiences with engaging content and want audiences to contribute to their stories to make them more relevant, but this does not necessarily shift journalistic practices a great deal.

Even if the journalists I interviewed did not mention the global conversation themselves, I still believe that the term, with its endorsement from senior management, was significant in setting up a framework for the organisation to make a change from being a broadcaster which transmits information to incorporating audience participation. The BBC WS's objectives have changed over time, as demonstrated in this chapter, and a dialogic turn could be seen as yet another way for the BBC WS to legitimise its existence and power in a changing world.

The promise of more space for democratic debate online through social media is one of the factors that fuelled the dialogic turn in public engagement, and therefore also the global conversation. However, lack of access to technology in a continent where only a quarter of all people have regular access to the internet means that the global conversation might not be so global after all. In line with the techno sceptics, I will therefore question here the egalitarian power of social media in Africa (Louw 2011b, Wasserman 2010). It is legitimate to ask who the global conversation is actually for, who is included and who is excluded. The next section discusses the changing influence of different actors on social media networks and the BBC African services' role in that changing landscape of networked relational power structures.



#### **4.6 Digital divides, crowdsourced elites and the future of BBC WS influence**

While most audiences in Africa still listen to the BBC on shortwave radio, the BBC WS is trying to make up for its falling shortwave listening figures by creating radio partnerships with local FM stations and through TV and increasingly the internet, including social media like Facebook and Twitter. Although 20 million radio listeners (in 2010<sup>47</sup>) for BBC Africa in English sounds impressive, Africa is a continent with a population (in 2013) of 1.033 billion people, according to the World Population Review.<sup>48</sup> BBC social media initiatives on Facebook and Twitter encompass a fraction of the people reached by radio, but they nevertheless open up important questions about the shifting power between producers and consumers and the difference this makes to audiences in Africa and transnational communities.

When the main means of audience participation are on social media, access to the internet becomes an important feature of open and inclusive debates. However, large parts of Africa still have significantly lower access to the internet than the rest of the world. This inequality mirrors established divides in society in relation to income, education and class (Avle 2011). According to ITU's latest figures from June 2016, 28.7% of Africa's current population of over one billion people (or 340,783,342 million individuals)<sup>49</sup> have regular access to the internet, compared to 54.2% in the rest of the world.<sup>50</sup> According to the same study, only 9.3% of the population in Africa has an active social media account on the most popular social media platform, Facebook, meaning that over 90% of people in Africa currently lack access to social media, and even less had such access at the time of my study in 2011-2013.

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47 Interview with the BBC WS Research Manager for Africa.

48 <<http://worldpopulationreview.com/continents/africa-population/>> Accessed 15th November 2016

49 Population estimate Africa 2014 mid-year estimates. <http://www.Internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm> Accessed 20th January 2015.

50 Africa Population is based on a 2016 mid-year estimate. Internet usage statistics are for June 30, 2016. <<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>> Accessed 6th November 2016.

Facebook has been seen as contributing to democratic life because it is somewhere where people who are connected socially can share and interact, therefore enhancing the public sphere by linking people together (Marichal 2012). However, people can of course only be linked together if they have access in the first place. Facebook has experienced significant growth in Africa in the past few years, and according to Internet World Stats, 146 million people in Africa had access to the social media platform in 2016,<sup>51</sup> with 80% of traffic to the site coming from mobile phones according to Facebook's own September 2014 report.<sup>52</sup> The huge gap between those connected to social media and those not might be shifting with the spread of the mobile internet, expected to reach 703 million 3G and 4G connections in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2018 (InternetSociety 2014:31-32). However, for the time being only an estimated 7% of people accessed social media from their mobile phone from anywhere in Africa in 2014.<sup>53</sup>

Limited access to social media has consequences for the type of conversations that go on within the participatory spaces of the BBC African services. According to previous research on social media journalism, users are usually more likely to trust and retweet stories from prominent news organisations or influential individuals who are prominent tweeters (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012). Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira refer to these news organisations or individual citizens on social media as crowdsourced elites. This phenomenon is evident in my case study of BBC Africa Debate, where elite organisations and individuals are more likely to be retweeted and are therefore more prominent in BBC Africa Debate's feed. Elites are mostly diaspora elites, bloggers, activists and intellectuals who tweet actively about African issues outside Africa. An unintended consequence of providing debate online is that many of

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51 <<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>> Accessed 6th November 2016.

52 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/video/?videoId=3772746299001>> Published 8th September 2014, accessed 4th August 2015.

53 Social Media Company We Are Social 2014 data based on Survey data Facebook Q1 2015, Tencent Q4 2014, VKontakte Q3 and Q4 2014, Wikipedia for population data <<http://was-sg.wascdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Slide031.png>> Accessed 22nd January 2015.

the audiences who engage with BBC Africa content on social media are outside Africa, in the USA, the UK and the rest of the EU. They also have better access to the internet than those who live in the continent, which also means that there is a bias towards targeting urban elites in Africa, among whom connections are more common.

Traditionally established media like the BBC are often thought to have more power online than individuals and other interest groups. However, many bloggers and NGOs have more followers and influence on Twitter than the BBC African services do. In some cases, individual tweeters involved in the BBC African services debates have more followers than the BBC. The social media editor of BBC Africa Debate argues that these social media influences, or crowdsourced elites, are the real competitors for BBC Africa Debate, not other international broadcasters like Voice of America or Deutsche Welle (fieldnotes, 23rd November 2012, interview with social media editor). When discussing power and equality within the BBC Africa Debates on Twitter, perhaps it is not the BBC that is the dominant voice, but rather those who have more influence on social media because they are relevant and relatable to diverse African audiences. Crowdsourced elites make the power dynamic very different to when the BBC WS mainly spoke to 'information poor listeners' – the organisation's own definition of poor rural listeners in Sub-Saharan Africa (Wilding 2011).

#### **4.7 Summary**

This chapter has shown how the BBC WS has gone from its foundation in 1932 as the Empire Service, a tool for the British Empire to reach out to its foreign dominions with educational and informative broadcasting, to its current status, 80 years later, as a media organisation which is trying to become more collaborative with its audience in producing news stories (Horrocks 2009). I refer to this 'audience-led' shift as participatory journalism and argue that broadcasting is currently going through a dialogic turn in accordance with Escobar's (2009) framework of a dialogic turn in public

deliberation, as discussed in Chapter 2. This dialogic turn puts emphasis on inclusion and equality, as well as giving importance to listening to and respecting each other's experiences and perspectives in public debate. In line with these values, one of the BBC WS's recent aims has been to foster a 'global conversation' (BBCWS 2010). I argue that although this global conversation does not come through in journalists' discourse, it has enabled a shift in the BBC WS's focus from transmission to audience participation.

At the same time, the BBC WS has changed from a major force which developed Africa's broadcasting structures to a diminishing role in the more competitive media landscape in the continent today. Africa is now a competitive media market with thousands of local radio stations and other media outlets, including mobile content and social media. In response to a changing media landscape, the BBC WS is moving its focus towards social media and audience participation. This chapter has shown that this shift is not taking place in isolation; rather, this development comes at a time when the BBC WS has seen cuts in funding since 2010 as part of a major government spending review announced in October 2010. These cuts put pressure on staff in the remaining services, including BBC Africa, to prove their relevance. Delivering participatory journalism via social media has been one way in which journalists have tried to do so.

The BBC has previously exerted power over audiences in Africa, but now these audiences use new forms of small media like social media and citizen journalism to respond and create contra-flows to discourses from the Global North, including from the BBC. However, although participatory journalism allows audiences to talk back, it is still important to understand the BBC WS through the context of soft power, with the British government using the BBC to promote British values in Africa. The global conversation is a tool to promote British versions of democracy and public debate. Cultural imperialism is also important from the perspective of techno-utopians, who

argue that social media will solve inequality, while most audiences in Africa lack access to such platforms. Participatory journalism and the dialogic turn in broadcasting raise questions about media power and the ways the BBC WS has influenced its audiences, now and in the past.

The central argument in this thesis is about participatory journalism and the shifting production practices at the BBC WS, a British organisation which invites the audience in to participate and contribute to content. It can be argued that the global conversation is a continuation of the BBC WS's attempts to make itself relevant in a changing media landscape and political context, this time by trying to foster closer relationships with its audiences. Whether this move contributes to a more deliberative and participatory service, and ultimately leads to more democratic forms of debate, depends on the ongoing practices of journalists and audiences which will be analysed and discussed in chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis.

# Chapter 5 — The Blurred Boundaries between Producers and Audiences at the BBC African Services

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the concept of participatory journalism, where professional journalists co-create news with audiences in Africa who use social media. The three mediated moments of participatory journalism at the BBC African services studied for this thesis are examples of participatory initiatives where audiences are invited to post their own views and comment on and debate content relating to politics, business, sport and culture on social media spaces managed by the BBC African services on platforms such as Ushahidi, Facebook and Twitter. These moments provide examples of minimalist and maximalist participation (Carpentier 2007) in relation to journalism, enabling me to study the implications of participatory journalism for international democratic debate.

As discussed in Chapter 2, deliberative democracy theory predicts an increased democratisation of public discourse as a result of the public being able to break the information monopoly held by professional journalists and their organisations. I find the debate about social media democratising public debate particularly pertinent as a research topic in the context of a broadcasting tradition of transmitting information from the Global North to the Global South, as in the case of the BBC WS's 60 year history of broadcasting to the African continent outlined in Chapter 4. Social media has previously been discussed as a way for citizens in various African contexts to come together through new forms of publicness, away from nationally controlled media or

misrepresentations by dominant Western media (Avle 2011, Kalyango Jr and Adu-Kumi 2013). Apart from a lack of media freedom and the failure to fairly represent the diverse audiences in today's Sub-Saharan Africa in national and local media (Hydén, Leslie et al. 2003, Louw 2011), Western media which struggle to fairly represent African countries, politics, cultures and persons still dominate provision of media content in Africa and around the world. I am therefore particularly interested in the blurred boundaries between producers at the BBC African services and the English speaking audiences they aim to target in Sub-Saharan African, as this may help to understand if participatory journalism is really able to provide more scope for everyone to be represented fairly and express their opinion, irrespective of national, cultural, class, gender or other belongings (Murdock 1994). However, previous research has shown that the inequality that exists in the offline world usually also translates to the online sphere (Avle 2011, Graham 2011).

Social media has contributed user friendly tools that audiences can use to take part in the production of news, but previous research has shown that when journalists use social media they still try to normalise the medium to fit their professional journalistic norms of gatekeeping, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Singer 2005, Lasorsa, Lewis et al. 2012). In addition to gatekeeping, the journalistic ideology of impartiality and objectivity marginalises many non-professional contributors who strive to have a say. Some of the journalistic practices I observed at the BBC African services during my research, outlined in this chapter, call into question whether journalists' news values and editorial guidelines have shifted as a result of audience participation.

In order to judge the changing roles of the production and consumption of media, and determine whether such changes result in more democratic forms of debate, it is necessary to understand the shifting practices of participation at the BBC African services. This chapter therefore deals with the question of whether journalism at the

BBC African services is becoming more participatory and if these new practices really blur the boundaries between producers and audiences, thus creating new more democratic news spaces as a result. This chapter is structured as follows.

Section 5.2 analyses the BBC initiative Nigeria Votes, a crowd sourced map on the social media platform Ushahidi during the 2011 Nigerian election. I show that the editors of the user-generated coverage were wary of giving up control of the editing process and that journalistic gatekeeping functions were still strong at the Nigerian Election Desk. However, despite the strong gatekeeping tendency, the editor in charge tinkered with and adapted the BBC's editorial guidelines to make them relevant to a participatory news environment, showing that news values and journalistic practices are constantly evolving. In the case of the Nigerian election map, the power of storytelling remained with the producers, not the audience.

Section 5.3 discusses a new radio debate programme, BBC Africa Debate, and asks whether allowing for studio and social media participation made the programme more audience-led compared to traditional debate programmes. The analysis shows that despite the dialogic format of the new programme, the selection of audiences and the strict focus on facts versus opinions limited the number and diversity of voices that could be heard. The Africa Debate space on Twitter is shown to be more open and participatory compared to the radio programme due its greater availability in terms of time and space, while there was also less gatekeeping by BBC journalists. However, the use of social media to accompany the radio debates was kept so separate from the actual radio programme that they formed two separate communicative spaces. As a result, the social media conversations actually had very little real impact on the BBC programme agenda or the way in which debate topics were covered.



Section 5.4 demonstrates how the football fan community Love African Football provided a transnational space on Facebook for collective football fandom practices. The BBC drove participation by posting results, questions, commentary, photos and analysis, but there was a dialogue between producers and audiences, with journalists answering questions as well as getting involved in the debate.

Each of these three mediated moments shows that participatory practices are changing and developing over time, indicating that participatory journalism is both an interplay between technology and practice and a renegotiation of power between actors on new platforms.

## **5.2 From gatekeeping to gatewatching – citizen reporting and professional filtering**

On the day of the Nigerian election on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011, audiences in Nigeria were asked to submit comments, photos and videos via Facebook, Twitter, SMS and email in order to help the BBC populate the BBC Ushahidi Election Map. The call to action on the BBC WS website was expressed in the following way:

Nigerians are going to the polls today, to vote for the country's next president. As part of the BBC's coverage we want to capture the voting experiences of ordinary Nigerians. So we're asking you to send us your photos and reports of what is happening in your area. Tell us where you are, what is happening and we will add you to the map.

This call to action encouraged the voting public in Nigeria to report what was going on in their area during the election and thus invited participants to act as citizen reporters on behalf of the BBC WS. The public had the opportunity to control the message and tell the stories they wanted to be told, at least in principle. However, a limiting factor for participation was that rather than allowing the public to publish their comments directly

onto the Ushahidi map, the BBC placed a professional journalistic filter between citizen reporters and the map by reading through all the comments coming into the BBC Nigeria Election Desk before publishing them on the map. This moderation of the map meant that although the public was encouraged to send in reports, the BBC producers were still ultimately in charge of what was being reported.<sup>54</sup>

Previous studies of participatory journalism have pointed out that gatekeeping functions are part of a conscious defence mechanism for journalists who want to hold on to their professional status (Matheson 2004, Singer 2004, Deuze 2005, Lowrey and Anderson 2005). The quote below is an extract from an interview with one of the senior editors at the BBC African services about using social media content in the election coverage.

Yes they can go to Facebook, email, send SMS; we incorporate their suggestions and comments. Technology has made it easier but we still need to verify what they are saying, we still need reporters (fieldnotes, interview with senior editor 21<sup>st</sup> March 2011).

Despite technology making it easier for audiences to participate, the editor argues that BBC reporters and the process of verification are still important, as without this the audience would lose faith in the BBC (fieldnotes 21<sup>st</sup> March 2011). As my time in the newsroom went by, the BBC Africa team became less and less concerned with verification on third party sites, mainly due to the perceived separation between social media and the BBC in terms of both platform and brand. On social media, BBC producers do not have the same control over participation; instead it is the third party provider that decides what content is appropriate. The level of intervention on social media platforms is usually low, and both Twitter and Facebook have been blamed for

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<sup>54</sup> Most citizen reports came in to the BBC via Facebook; they were published openly on the BBC Africa Facebook page and then cut and pasted on to the Ushahidi map. In that sense, although the map was edited, the posting mechanism on Facebook meant that citizen reports went straight into the public domain of a social media platform without any filtering, apart from the discarding of any abusive comments. SMS messages and emails which were sent in were filtered and read through before being published on the Ushahidi map, without being publicly accessible beforehand.

insufficiently policing abusive language on their platforms.<sup>55</sup> Both Facebook and Twitter allow account administrators to remove comments and ban people who make abusive remarks, which meant that the BBC producers had some control over conversations during their social media initiatives.

During the 2011 Nigerian election, BBC management had genuine worries that if the initiative were mismanaged this could lead to political unrest and violence in Nigeria. The reason for this was that the Ushahidi map had been used by protesters during the unrest which accompanied the 2008 Kenyan election (Mäkinen and Kuira 2008). BBC journalists worried that if there were trouble in the form of violence or riots, a fully audience-led map could be hijacked and used for a particular political agenda, and thus further aggravate unrest in the country (fieldnotes 4th April 2011). The editor of the initiative explained to me that if the map were used for political campaigning, the BBC WS's brand as an impartial and balanced news provider could be damaged (fieldnotes 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011). Therefore, the topic for the BBC WS Ushahidi election map was chosen because it was seen as neutral, and unlikely to encourage political unrest. The topic was for citizens in Nigeria to contribute to the map by reporting on their voting experience, so the call out for participation asked them 'what is happening in your area'<sup>56</sup>, see chapter 3 for further details. The journalists also did not allow participants to publish their comments themselves straight onto the map; instead BBC editors checked citizens' reports before posting them on the map to avoid controversy.

The BBC journalists I observed and interviewed during the Nigerian election initiative were very careful to follow BBC editorial policy at all times. Following editorial policy is about making sure to retain the public's trust in the BBC by maintaining standards in

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55 Article in which Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of Facebook, responds to criticism of hate speech. <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/feb/26/mark-zuckerberg-hate-speech-germany-facebook-refugee-crisis>> Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2016.

Article showing how Twitter has responded to criticism of hate speech on its platform. <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/dec/29/twitter-unveils-revised-rules-regarding-hate-speech-in-posts>> Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2016.

56 BBC WS Facebook post <<https://www.facebook.com/bbcworldservice/posts/211625208866955>> accessed 21st January 2017

terms of truth, accuracy, impartiality, accountability, public interest and independence.<sup>57</sup>

An important part of news reporting is verification, or 'the process of establishing the truth, accuracy, or validity of something'.<sup>58</sup> Section 3.4.3 of the BBC's editorial guidelines deals with the verification of user-generated content and provides the following rules for BBC journalists who deal with content provided by the public:

There are separate considerations for user generated content. We should not automatically assume that the material is accurate and should take reasonable steps, depending on how it is to be used and if necessary to achieve due accuracy, to seek verification. We must take special care over how we use any material that we suspect has been supplied by a member of a lobby group or organisation with a vested interest in the story, rather than a disinterested bystander.

We should carefully scrutinise and, if necessary to achieve due accuracy, corroborate eyewitness accounts submitted by email before using them, for example by talking to eyewitnesses on the phone.

We should ensure that user generated content is clearly identified as such (BBC 2015:3.4.3).

The guidelines emphasise the need to verify content from users to make sure it is accurate and express concern that content could be supplied by lobby groups with vested interests. In order to mitigate this risk, journalists are encouraged to make sure that eyewitnesses are who they say they are, by talking to them on the phone for example. In addition, it is important that user-generated content is clearly marked as such so it cannot be confused with the BBC's professional content. When studying the

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<sup>57</sup> BBC College of Journalism Academy Editorial Values < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/values> > Accessed 31st August 2015.

<sup>58</sup> <<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/verification>> Accessed 17th April 2016.

user-generated Ushahidi content map during the 2011 Nigerian election, it became clear that it was important for editors at the African newsdesk that any content for the election map generated by audiences was verified accurately. In Chapter 2, I pointed out that no information or fact is value free and that journalism, like other forms of cultural content, is part of what becomes accepted wisdom at certain times and in certain circumstances. In this case, journalists place themselves as the gatekeepers of verified content, which can be seen as an example of how professionals hold on to power over information flows.

On the day of the election, with only two social media editors working on populating the map, it was impossible to verify all the comments that came in before placing them on the crowdmap. Other academic studies of participatory journalism have found that pre-moderation of user-generated content is very expensive and time consuming (Hermida and Thurman 2008, Thurman 2008, Bakker and Pantti 2009, Karlsson 2011). The task of verifying user-generated content for the crowdmap could have been even more labour-intensive if there had been thousands of contributions to the map as opposed to just 67. In order to speed up the publishing process on Election Day, the social media editor was able to circumvent the rigorous verification process recommended in the BBC's editorial guidelines. Rather than verifying all comments coming into the Nigerian Election Desk, she decided instead that audience reports could be published straight away by clearly signposting that they were unverified. The screen grab below shows an audience report on the map labelled as unverified.

### 'Voters disillussioned'

UNVERIFIED

12:02 Apr 16 2011 Yina Ala, Makurdi Benue

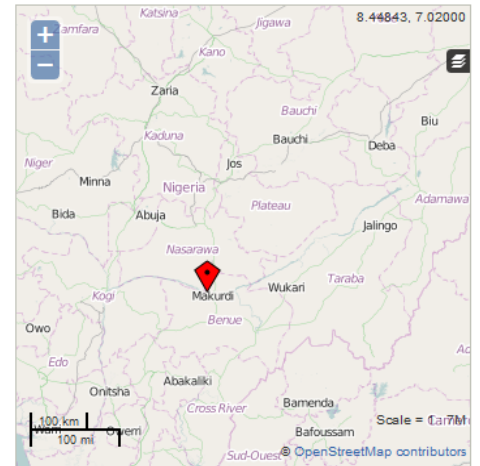
Accreditation underway

#### Description

"Many people are disillussioned here in yina ala pol station Makurdi Benue state as you can see in the low turn up of voters"

Paul Mningem via Facebook

Credibility: 0



Picture 5.1 — Screen grab of BBC Nigeria, 2011 Crowdfmap

Source: screen grab <[www.bbcnigeria2011.crowdfmap.com](http://www.bbcnigeria2011.crowdfmap.com)> Accessed 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

The unverified label allowed editors to go ahead and publish reports of election day from members of the public while still following the BBC's editorial guidelines in terms of 'clearly identifying user-generated content as such' (BBC 2015: Editorial Guidelines 3.4.3).

Despite the user-generated content being marked as unverified, the editors still amended some comments in order to make sure they followed BBC guidelines; this is covered in more detail in Chapter 6. This practice sets the Ushahidi initiative apart from later social media initiatives I studied, where comments were left as they were and producers only removed comments if they were offensive. The Ushahidi experiment can be seen as a transition from online forums hosted on BBC platforms with a high level of moderation and editing of comments to a more relaxed social media editorial policy, sometimes referred to as gatewatching (Bruns 2003). Despite the continued presence of gatekeeping practices during the Ushahidi initiative, the map arguably still had an important democratic role. By allowing citizens in Nigeria to report from their different locations, the representation of Nigerian locations was extended beyond the places to which BBC reporters could physically travel. Audiences from all over the world who

found the link to the crowdmap from BBC websites<sup>59</sup> could read about what was happening in areas in Nigeria that rarely feature in international news coverage.

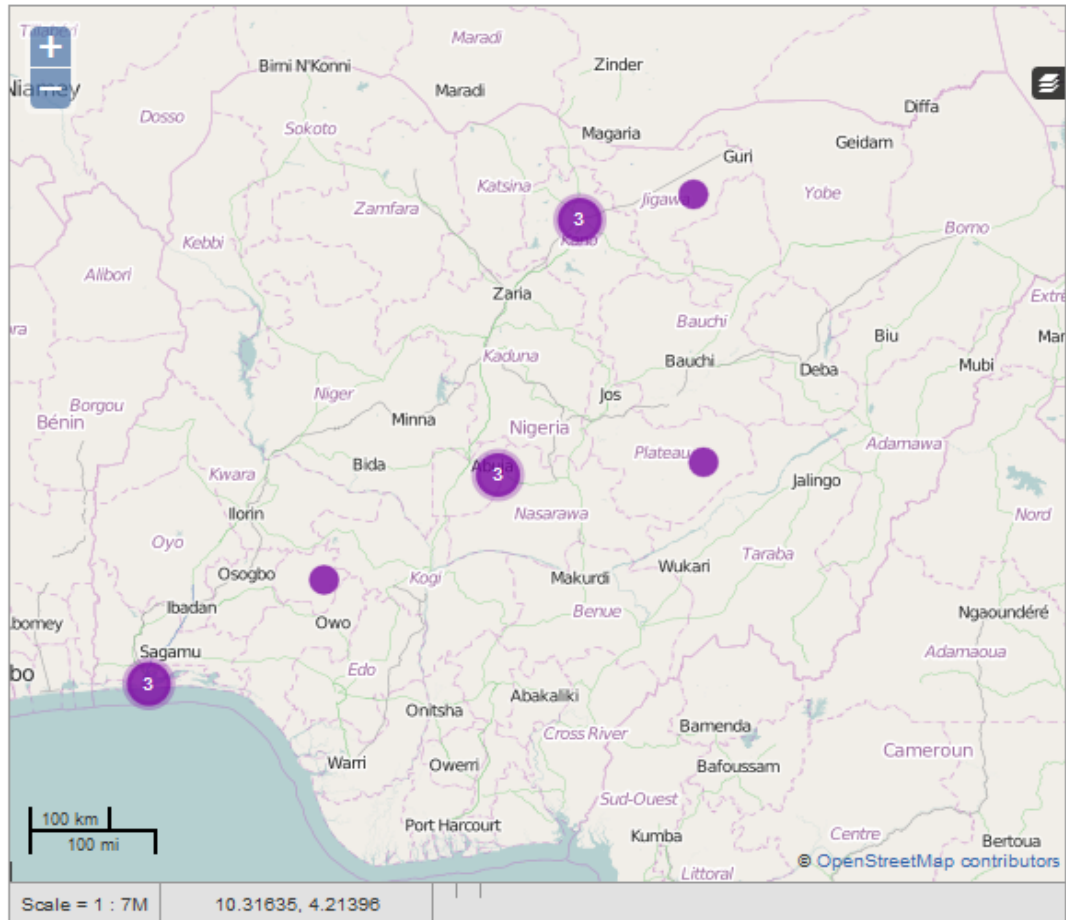
### **5.2.1 User-generated reporting and rural representation**

In addition to the 36 user-generated reports on the map there were also 11 reports from BBC reporters who were in Nigeria covering the election on behalf of the BBC WS, BBC World and BBC public service news in the UK. The main reason for using reports from BBC reporters on the Ushahidi map was that their reports could be verified and could therefore include photos, video and audio from their locations. The BBC reporters were predominantly based in three locations: Lagos, Abuja and Kano. Although these three cities cover the southern (Lagos), central (Abuja) and northern (Kano) regions of Nigeria, including both Muslim and Christian areas, they are all urban areas, whereas the majority of people in Nigeria (57% of the population) still live in rural areas (CIA Fact book 2014<sup>60</sup>). The screen grab below shows verified reports from BBC journalists in Nigeria on the crowdmap.

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59 At this time the BBC WS website in English had over 1 million unique visitors, according to BBC in-house research (field notes January 2011).

60 <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>> Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> June 2015

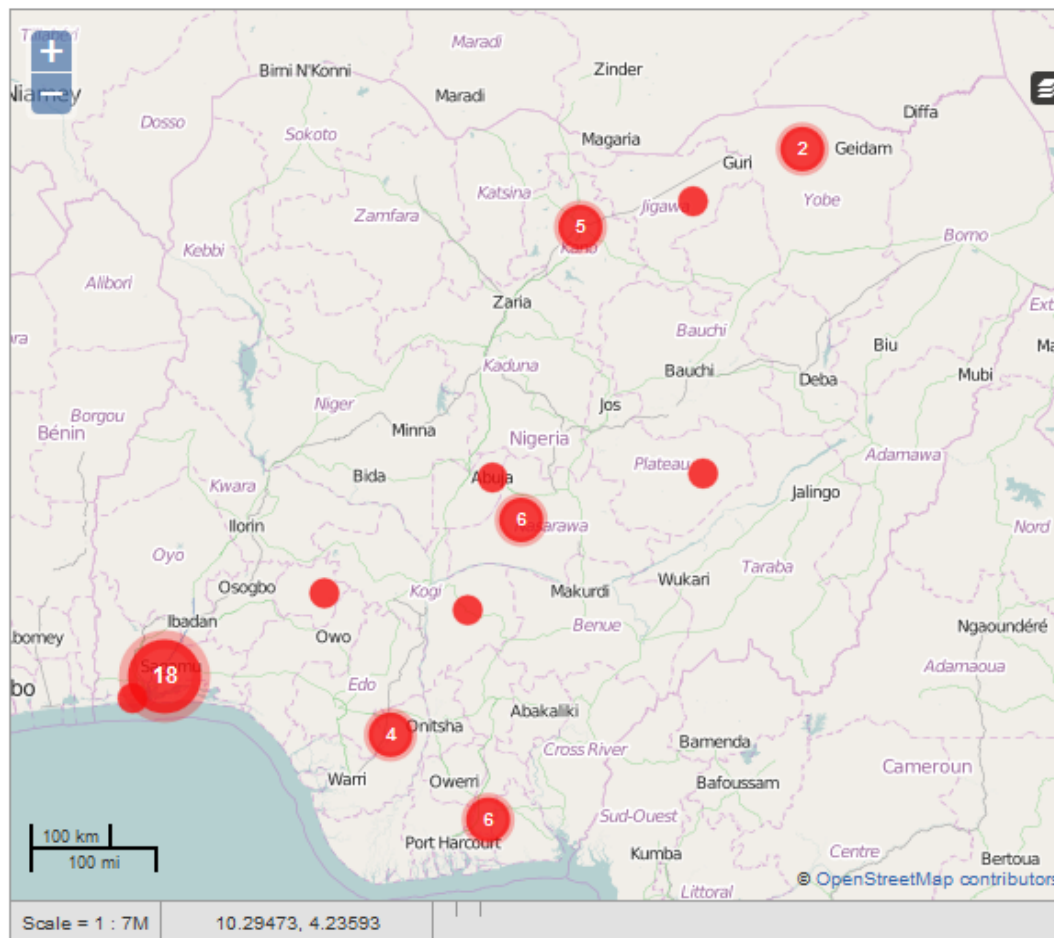


Picture 5.2 — Screen grab of BBC Nigeria crowd map.

Source: < <https://bbcnigeria2011.crowdmap.com/main> > Accessed 25th February 2015.

In contrast to the reports from BBC journalists, unverified reports from the public extended the geographic spread of reports beyond cities where BBC reporters were stationed, as shown on the Ushahidi map below.





Picture 5.3 — Screen grab of BBC Nigeria crowd map.

Source: <<https://bbcnigeria2011.crowdmap.com/main>> Accessed 25th February 2015.

Crowdsourced geographic data has become vital, for example in emergency management during events such as the earthquakes in Japan and Haiti as well as during the Kenyan election crisis in 2007-2008. Geographic information created by amateur citizens, known as 'volunteered geographic information', has increasingly become a viable alternative information source to official agencies and corporations (Goodchild and Glennon 2010). For the mapping industry, data quality is a major concern, since volunteered information is not linked to the assurances that lead to trust in official data. However, during emergencies the advantages of using unofficial sources often outweigh the problems. Official mapping practice can be compared to journalistic practices, where journalists see themselves as the gatekeepers of verified information. I argue that the benefits of being able to cover a larger part of Nigeria in reporting could

outweigh the risk of publishing unverified data, as was demonstrated in a separate but simultaneous Ushahidi project, described below.

### 5.2.2 Crowd-verification and democratic monitoring

Bailard and Livingston (2014) have studied another crowdmap initiative, *Reclaim Naija*,<sup>61</sup> which was set up to crowdsource election monitoring, also on Ushahidi, at the same time as the BBC Nigerian election crowdmap. Crowdsourced monitoring relies on a huge number of amateur observers volunteering to send in their own experience at local polling stations (Bailard and Livingston 2014). The authors claim that crowdsourced technology made it easier to cover polling stations all over the country, even in remote places, with users taking advantage of simple mobile technology to send in reports via SMS messages. During the course of the elections, between 9th and 16th April 2011, the *Reclaim Naija* Ushahidi crowdmap received 27,178 citizen reports in total, in comparison to the BBC initiative, for which there were only 67 contributions. These initiatives were significantly different for many reasons, including the fact that the BBC is an international news organisation, whilst *Reclaim Naija* was organised and managed from Nigeria by Nigerian not for profit organisations. In addition, *Reclaim Naija* used a more open approach to submissions, with citizens able to submit reports without having to go through a professional verification filter, thus democratising the publishing of reports.

*Reclaim Naija's* success was dependent on the mobilisation of civil society groups and on community engagement in Nigeria. The civil society organisation Community Life Project (CLP) and its key partners Community Development Departments Nationwide and the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) successfully raised public awareness of *Reclaim Naija*. A grassroots public awareness campaign organised 193 voter education forums across Nigeria's 36 states, with

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<sup>61</sup> Naija is a term for Nigeria used by youth which has spread on social networking sites; it is used to describe the new Nigeria, its culture and people, distinct from traditional conceptions of the country.

participants drawn from faith-based organisations, community development associations and youth and health associations, as well as informal sector workers and trade-based-groups such as associations of mechanics, carpenters, vulcanisers, welders, okada riders and owners, market stallholders, electricians, tailors and hairdressers. In addition, promotion methods like placing stickers on motorbikes, distributing wrist bands with the mobile number to text and radio jingles were also used in the awareness campaign.

It has been claimed that *Reclaim Naija* contributed to a fairer Nigerian election, as the public used Ushahidi to expose shortcomings and so improved the functioning of polling stations between the National Assembly (NASS) election on 9th April and the presidential election on 16<sup>th</sup> April (Bailard and Livingston 2014). Apart from citizen reports on the Ushahidi platform itself, the organisers of *Reclaim Naija* and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which overlooked the conduct of the election were aware of polling problems, and were in constant contact during the voting process, especially after the 9<sup>th</sup> April NASS election. Thus, it was not just the crowdsourcing platform that increased the functionality of polling stations; it was also the formal and informal networking between the organisers of the crowdsourcing platform and the INEC, a network link that the BBC lacked.

In contrast to the BBC, *Reclaim Naija* did not put emphasis on verification of each report that came in, focusing instead on getting many reports, with the number of reports acting as a method of verification if the accounts supported each other. Thus, there was an implicit trust built into the monitoring system (Bailard and Livingston 2014). In order for crowdmaps to work, journalists cannot verify every single citizen's contribution. Instead, verification needs to move from journalists' individual intelligence towards 'collective intelligence where expertise and authority are distributed and networked' (Hermida 2012: 659). However, Ushahidi has a method of verification where a report can be marked as verified if it has been substantiated by an official

source or by multiple eyewitness accounts (Jewitt 2009). This function was used during the BBC Nigeria Votes Ushahidi initiative, but only BBC reporters' posts were given the verified label on the map; all citizen reports were marked as unverified. While it can be argued that there were not enough contributions on the BBC map to rely on crowd verification, it is also possible to assume that the BBC's initiative could have been more successful if it had been promoted widely on BBC platforms and had involved less verification and more grassroots organising in Nigeria. Instead of allowing an open crowdsourced approach, the BBC journalists still watched the gates and used a professional filter to determine what could be published on the election map and how. The next section looks at how BBC journalists struggle to open up participation on the BBC's own platforms, with social media left as a separate communicative space for audiences to debate and take ownership of BBC Africa-initiated debates beyond the BBC's control, with little impact on the overall news agenda.

### **5.3 BBC Africa Debate – barriers to producing an audience-led radio programme**

BBC Africa Debate launched in January 2012 with the ambition of being an audience-led radio programme. It was and still is broadcast by the BBC African services once a month, from a different African location each time, involving 100 guests invited to take part in the debate. I followed the production of the programme for three months from March to June 2012, during which time three programmes were produced and broadcast. I observed the implementation of a threefold strategy for participation: a) the studio audience participated and led the debate; b) the topic of debate was discussed on social media prior to, during and after the programme; and c) social media was used to interact with tweeters, bloggers and other interest groups, who were also invited to attend the debates.

The core element of the debate or talk show genre is usually that a host talks to people in a studio setting, generally a panel of experts, with very little interaction from the studio audience (Leurdijk 1997). The BBC Africa Debate format sets itself apart from traditional debate programmes in that it is the 100 guests in the studio who, at least in theory, are supposed to lead the debate and question the panel of 5 to 10 experts, holding them to account (fieldnotes, interview with senior producer 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012). As the senior producer of Africa Debate expresses, 'we want an intelligent debate, and we want the audience to take on the panellists'.

The advantage of any debate show, not just BBC Africa Debate, is that politicians, experts and ordinary people are put together in one room, the confrontation making it possible to hold those in power to account (Livingstone and Lunt 1994, Carpentier 2011). BBC Africa Debate is the first regular debate programme to be broadcast on BBC WS radio, although BBC Media Action, the charitable arm of the BBC WS, also broadcasts debate programmes to developing countries, for example *Sahaja Sawal* to Nepal<sup>62</sup> (Larkin and Were 2013). A BBC Media Action report here discusses political debate programmes and the link between these shows and democratic discussion:

Political debate programmes on radio or television present a range of different opinions to an audience, and sometimes give audience members the opportunity to participate. Unlike news media, which provide a one-way flow of information (a 'monologic format'), discussion and debate programmes allow two-way communication (a 'dialogic format'). These formats could be said to be a tool for supporting democratic discussion (Larkin and Were 2013: 3).

However, there are criticisms of how participatory such formats really can be and what the value of the debate they produce is. For example, if the debate is too

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62 Programme website: <<http://bbcsajhasawal.com/en/>> Accessed 24<sup>th</sup> April 2016.

confrontational, in place of successful deliberation the topic can potentially become trivialised, as with tabloid shows such as the Jeremy Kyle show.<sup>63</sup> Another criticism made of talk show debates is that they can be seen as just a series of unrelated utterances which give an illusion of a debate but which lack the benefits of a public discussion where mutuality is reached (Tomasulo 1984). Despite the efforts of the host or presenters, it is also difficult to get the power balance between the host, the experts and the participants right (Carpentier 2011). BBC Africa Debate has a larger studio audience than established debate programme formats on radio and TV, and allowing more audience members time to have a say during the show indicates a more dialogic format compared to most other monologic programmes on BBC WS radio or other international radio networks. Although BBC Africa Debate is a more dialogic programme than is the norm for BBC WS radio, my research shows that BBC Africa producers still control who is allowed to participate and the topics and framing of debates.

Producers control who attends the programme by inviting certain people to take part. Naturally, not everyone who wants to join the debate can, as the number of places for guests in the studio is limited to 100. Producers spend a great deal of time sourcing lists of potential audience members from contacts in the location from which the programme will be broadcast. The method of invitation is through fixers, local correspondents, charities, and perhaps most importantly, through BBC Media Action, who run productions in many of the relevant locations and therefore have local contacts (fieldnotes, interview with senior manager BBC Africa services 12<sup>th</sup> June 2012).

Debate programmes have been described as a medium which allows the public to have a say, as expressed by Kilby and Horowitz (2013): 'Public participation in broadcast media offers an arena in which everyday people are availed opportunities to express

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<sup>63</sup> *The Jeremy Kyle Show* is a British tabloid talk show presented by Jeremy Kyle. It has been broadcast on ITV since 4 July 2005.

their views and opinions on a public stage.’ However, my research shows that in the case of Africa Debate, the objective of the programme was not to talk to everyday people; rather, the priority was to avoid broadcasting only the opinions of the public. The journalists posed opinions against facts as if they were binaries. In Chapter 2, I mentioned that no fact presented by either journalists or the public can really be presented without a value or opinion attached to it, thus facts are not value free. This false binary of fact versus opinion is a key contributing factor limiting equal participation in the BBC Africa debates I observed.

My research shows that, in an attempt to avoid laymen’s opinions, the producers’ aim is for experts rather than the public to take part in debates, and as a result much of the invited audience consists of academics, students, politicians and representatives of interest groups like NGOs and charities. Selecting who will be in the studio audience of 100 people for each monthly debate constitutes a large part of preparing and planning for the programme. The producers try to ensure that the studio audience has knowledge of the debate topic and has something to say, either by being an expert or by having lived through experience which relates to the subject. The quote below illustrates how producers looked for a range of people for the debate about relations between China and Africa:

I am looking for business people and academics, I am looking for civil society groups who think Zambia is getting a raw deal, or not; trade unions who think the Chinese are disobeying labour laws, or not. I look for people who have worked in the mines with Chinese companies and have had to leave, those kinds of people, with experience or knowledge of the subject (fieldnotes, interview with senior producer 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012).

As the quote suggests, when producers are probed further, it becomes clear that experience also counts in making someone an expert: 'We want to move towards knowledge-based and first-hand accounts, i.e. I talk about this because I know about it or because I have lived through it' (fieldnotes, interview with senior producer 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012). In Chapter 2, I discussed experience-based knowledge based on feminist theory (Haraway 1978) and how opinions based on experience are valuable even if the claim to knowledge is not made in the right format of articulation for journalists to include in news reports.

In the following quote, the senior producer of Africa Debate explains that if participants are just expressing an opinion they cannot defend it, and therefore it is preferable to talk to people who have knowledge of topics:

We wanted something completely different from AHYS; we want people who know what they are talking about. The callers used to phone in and say 'he is a bad man', and you say 'why is he a bad man?' and they can't really defend that, we want people who can defend their opinion and explain why they think that way (fieldnotes, interview with senior producer 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012).

The criteria for inviting experts are referred to by the senior producer as a 'knowledge based' approach, which in their view favours 'facts rather than opinion'. I argue here that the opinions of the public in Africa, 'the audience' are also knowledge based; the knowledge gained from experience is also valuable even if it is not articulated with the authority of an expert. I have not found evidence supporting a clear division between facts and opinions, facts are driven or framed by opinions, as previously discussed. The strategy of the producers of BBC Africa Debate, however, signifies a clear diversion from the previous AHYS



programme, where callers usually expressed a layman's opinion rather than being an expert on the topic they were talking about. BBC Africa management and the producers of BBC Africa Debate also referred to fact versus opinion as providing 'more light and less heat in the African public sphere' (fieldnotes 12<sup>th</sup> June 2012).

The mantra 'more light, less heat' was the title of a brochure published by BBC management in 2011, aimed at clearly positioning the British broadcaster as a force of 'truthfulness, impartiality, and restraint in the context of the broader information explosion' (Horrocks 2011: 15-16). The information explosion that Peter Horrocks, then director of the BBC WS, refers to in his introduction to the brochure is the expansion of social media and online opinion in relation to the Arab spring in 2011. In line with the wider political and organisational objective of more light less and less heat, BBC Africa's management want to clearly differentiate the programme from the sort of opinion that is increasingly becoming part of online discourse on blogs and social media. The news values that the producer talks about, separating facts from opinion and dividing reporting from advocacy, has previously been closely linked to journalistic gatekeeping (Singer 2005). In Chapter 2, I discussed how journalistic practices exist within a culture of objectivity, where emphasis is put on facts, impartiality and balance rather than on dialogue and mutual understanding. However, by only allowing certain forms of knowledge to be expressed in the programme, an open dialogue is eliminated. My analysis of BBC Africa Debate demonstrates a clear tension between journalistic gatekeeping and dialogue.

My interviews at the BBC African services also showed that the focus on expertise-based participation limited the number of women that producers were able to invite to the debates (fieldnotes, interview with junior producer 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012). The focus on certain types of expertise and experience meant for example

that in the case of the debate about China's role in Africa there were limited possibilities to invite women who were not academics, politicians or part of the labour force, but who could still be affected by Chinese investment through infrastructure, products and services, employment opportunities and political decisions. A junior producer talked about the difficulty of finding women who could participate in the show:

It is also important that they are good speakers and have something reasonably provocative to say. When we had an all-male panel we got criticised, but it is actually quite hard to find women who will speak about certain topics; but it does go down much better if you do have gender balance on the panel. It's very BBC to have a bunch of middle aged men talking down to people, but we don't want the panel to talk down to people (fieldnotes, interview with junior producer 31<sup>st</sup> May 2012).

The above quote states that gender balance is welcome and that producers want to change the perception that the BBC includes only white middle class men on its panels. If producers want debates to be more inclusive, it is important to allow different forms of expression and arguments based on different forms of knowledge, not only expert but also experiential and emotional (Escobar 2011). In Chapter 6, I will discuss in more depth how debates can be made more inclusive by drawing on the dialogue theory outlined in Chapter 2. However, from my findings discussed here, 'less heat more light' as an objective for Africa Debate seems too exclusive to permit a pluralist debate. As well as producers controlling who is invited to the show, the false distinction between facts and opinion further restricts who can be invited and thus limits the participatory qualities of the programme. My research shows that to a certain extent producers and presenters

also control what is said during broadcast debates by formatting and selecting comments.

### **5.3.1 Presenter in charge versus more democratic produsage**

A presenter-led debate programme is one where the presenter controls the debate (Priest 1995), making it impossible to base discussion on reciprocity and ideal role taking in line with democratic deliberation (Dahlberg 2001, Escobar 2011). However, it would not really be possible to have an hour long radio debate with 100 audience members without a presenter making sure that people do not talk over each other and constructing some kind of narrative to ensure that the programme is enjoyable to listen to. Therefore, although BBC Africa Debate aims to be an audience-led programme, two presenters still lead the debate. New forms of narrative construction on social media using Twitter feeds, hashtags and Facebook timelines do not need narration from a presenter in the way radio does. Algorithms controlled by social media companies help narration and aim to ensure that as much participation as possible takes place in order to attract advertising sales. However, at the time of my study journalists were still narrating the BBC Africa debates.

BBC Africa Debate presenters control both the flow and content of the broadcast debate. The phenomenon of talking to audiences and making sure they have something entertaining, important or controversial to say before being put in front of a microphone or camera has been referred to as formatting (Ytreberg 2004), or 'the process whereby production teams prepare non-professional participants for the programme's performance requirements' (Ytreberg 2004: 678). High levels of formatting were observed during the production of BBC Africa Debate, aimed at making sure debates were balanced, interesting and knowledge based.

Producers of the debate '*China in Africa: Partner or Plunderer?*' wanted to achieve an equal balance between participants who saw the Chinese as partners and those who thought of them as plunderers. As well as selecting the right participants for the audience, producers spent a lot of time talking to them to understand the arguments they wanted to present in the debate. The show's senior producer explained how they would first talk to the audience and then brief the presenter:

Debate the issues with all of them. It sounds crazy but you need to know what role they are going to have. You need to know if half of the room is going to be against China, so how do you deal with that, and then you have to brief the presenter (fieldnotes, interview with senior producer 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012).

This formatting was aimed at ensuring that the right balance of people from different sides of the debate was picked: 'I guess we try to make the panel reflective of the various sides of the debate that we want to have and the different interest groups that are represented' (fieldnotes, interview with junior producer 31st May 2012).

The BBC producers I observed and interviewed often talked about 'balance', meaning giving a voice to both sides of an argument. Balance is a cornerstone of the BBC's quest to be impartial, and could be seen as a way of trying to avoid having certain voices dominate debates. For example, when Africa Debate discussed land grabbing in Sierra Leone, far more people were against land grabbing than were positive about it. The producers had to struggle to find anyone who was in favour of land grabbing, as illustrated in the quote below. In the end they managed to find five people who supported land grabbing and invited them alongside 95 people who were against it. In order to achieve a balanced debate, the producers and presenters made sure that the

5% of people who supported land grabbing were able to have a say and thus balance the debate.

In Sierra Leone it was an issue because there are so many companies buying land in Sierra Leone and a lot of people are against it: most of the people, so how were we going to make sure that the debate sounded balanced, because it is so difficult to find people who think [land grabbing] is a good thing? In the end we had five people who were for out of 100, but then you have to make sure that the presenters know that those are the dynamics, and that those people get to have a say to make sure to balance the debate. In the end the presenter leads the debate (fieldnotes, interview with senior producer 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012).

On the one hand this balancing act might mean that producers allow minority voices to be heard and therefore avoid domination of the debate by one side. On the other hand the debate in the studio is not representative of what most people in Sierra Leone think about land grabbing. The BBC producers have a lot of control over the studio audience for radio programmes, but this control does not translate to the online social media space. Allowing people to participate online makes it possible to give people a say beyond the 100 people in the audience, at least those who have access to the internet. Producers have less control of the narrative on third party social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and Ushahidi than they do for programmes on the BBC or BBC-hosted websites. However, this does not mean that participation on social media is more equal or less controlled by powerful actors.

### **5.3.2 Social media, produsage and a more deliberative Africa Debate programme online?**

The initial idea for the launch of BBC Africa Debate in 2012 was to listen to the audience's conversations on Twitter and make programmes about topics they were already talking about: 'by using social media we can tap in to the conversations taking place online' (fieldnotes, interview with social media editor 3<sup>rd</sup> Oct 2011). This type of social media participation means that programmes can stay relevant to audiences, while producers can draw knowledge from people who are already talking about interesting topics online. Despite the fact that not many African listeners have access to the internet, producers perceive listening to social media audiences as less biased than inviting just a few experts to take part in a panel. Below, the senior manager at BBC Africa explains why social media increases the pool of people who producers talk to and learn from compared to pre-social media practices:

These people (tweeters) are influential and opinion formers. Why should we not draw knowledge from them? Before, traditionally, we used to go and ask academics in the American universities and get an informed opinion, but certainly not unbiased. In Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century public debate was driven by a few people in coffee houses. Twitter is that coffee house; at least it is more people than before (fieldnotes, interview with senior manager 12<sup>th</sup> June 2012).

The manager here compares Twitter to public debates in 18<sup>th</sup> century coffee houses. However, despite the commitment to allowing the audience to drive Africa Debate, it is still the BBC Africa team that sets the topic for each programme. Before the launch in October 2011, the team brainstormed a list of topics relevant to global audiences with an interest in Africa, preferably topics with Pan-African relevance and an appeal to a

global audience. When the list had been compiled, the editor sent it out to the wider BBC Africa team for feedback and it was also shown to partner stations in Africa.<sup>64</sup> Despite the emphasis on public debate, the team does not ask the audience to suggest topics via social media. However, a senior producer explained to me that the reason the audience is not allowed to select the topics is connected to planning cycles: 'When asking audiences what they want to debate it would inevitably be topical issues, and it is difficult to plan a monthly programme based on something that has happened the week before' (interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012). This shows the producer's lack in confidence that the audience would be able to suggest relevant and interesting stories and represents a barrier to BBC Africa Debate becoming a space for personal stories and experiential knowledge. Although audiences are not allowed to decide on topics, social media has an impact in other ways which extend the topics of BBC Africa Debate beyond the radio programme and out to the web, where BBC journalists have less control over what is said.

#### **5.4 Building participation through mobilising fans on Facebook**

In this section I argue that although the BBC's participatory social media spaces are separate from the BBC African services' main news output, they are still spaces where audiences participate with traditional news content and each other, and therefore the boundaries between production and consumption and between publishing and distribution are blurred. Previous research has shown that the use of social media in news reporting has led to the emergence of 'a hybrid, networked habitus that integrates values and practices from the traditional journalistic field with those from digital and nonprofessional origins' (Barnard 2016: 190). This combination of news practices is evident in the findings of my study of participatory coverage of the Africa Cup of Nations 2013 (AFCON 13) on Facebook. In this section I demonstrate that the type of

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<sup>64</sup> In African countries where the BBC WS does not have its own FM license, it collaborates with local radio stations. As well as broadcasting their own content on shortwave and medium wave, partner stations broadcast BBC programmes as part of their own broadcast schedules.

communication that occurs on social media forums managed by journalists is dependent not only on how the type of content is positioned and framed by the professionals, but also on how audiences interact in response. Hence, both production and audience practices lead to new producer roles.

Similarly to BBC Africa Debate and the Nigeria Election Map, audience participation in Love African Football was quite separate from the radio output which reported on AFCON 13. Love African Football was promoted as a separate platform for discussing football on Facebook. The Facebook page set up for the tournament was not even strongly associated with the BBC brand, the name of the Facebook fan page being *Love African Football*, not *BBC Love African Football* (see picture below).



Picture 5.4 Love African Football Facebook page.

Source: <<https://www.facebook.com/LoveAfricanFootball/>> Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

Love African Football provides a platform, open to all members of Facebook, where discussion about African football can take place. In order to understand the roles of producers and audiences on social media in this case it was necessary to analyse some



social media content in detail. There were 477<sup>65</sup> posts by BBC journalists<sup>66</sup> on the Love African football timeline between 19<sup>th</sup> January and 10<sup>th</sup> February 2013 (the duration of AFCON 13). Each post received several hundred and sometimes thousands of comments from fans during that time, with the average post receiving 125 comments, while some had as many as 8664 comments and over 10,000 likes. My analysis shows that some posts generated more expressions of support for national teams whilst others were formulated more as questions, meaning that fans could debate the topic. Different posts from the BBC African Football team generated different types of responses, with implications for participation and the potential quality of democratic debate taking place on such forums. In my study of these posts and producers' strategies for building a fan community for lovers of African football I observed that different types of posts generated different types of participation.

I have grouped the types of content posted by journalists during AFCON 13 into themes depending on the type of content posted and the level of response from fans generated by posts, ranging from low to high levels of participation. My analysis shows how participation and new forms of journalism are largely driven by journalistic practices as well as by the audience's response and consequent audiencing in relation to these professional practices. Love African Football showed clear evidence of participatory content, with stories being co-created by producers and football fans. Despite the participatory environment, journalists were in control of debates and directed the type of responses football fans gave by adopting different posting strategies, as described in the following subsections.

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<sup>65</sup> According to Facebook Analytics.

<sup>66</sup> Members of the BBC Africa team and other producers and journalists, such as sport journalists and BBC UGC (user-generated content) hub staff.

#### **5.4.1 *Football commentary* – Communal football audiencing on Facebook**

These posts resembled live radio commentary, and were written and posted in real time during games. This content was mostly driven by BBC journalists reporting on games rather than by participants providing commentary, although the live reporting allowed football audiences from all over the world to follow games and comment on goals live. The co-presence of fans following games and cheering their teams on together created a sense of being there which went beyond just listening or watching games via a broadcast medium.

These posts consisted of updates from the BBC team about the pre-match atmosphere and expectations for the game, the line-up of players, live football commentary, goal updates and results after the games. Of a total of 477 posts by BBC journalists, 108 comments contained football commentary and 90 contained updates about goals during matches. Although these posts did not generate as many comments on the Facebook forum as direct questions to fans, they generated similar kinds of debate, mostly consisting of expressions of loyalty, fans cheering their team on and general expressions of support. The constant flow of support messages was similar to watching or listening to a game with others in the same room. "This Facebook page allowed fans of African football to share the experience of watching games not only with their friends and family, but also with the BBC and other fans of the page." The live reporting seemed to generate a sense of closeness, if not necessarily a dialogue, although some posts on the BBC fan page merely mirrored more top-down forms of media publishing, as covered in the next section.

#### **5.4.2 *Journalist driven analysis* – Another channel for broadcasting**

These were summary articles written after games or pieces analysing particular events during the tournament and then posted on Facebook. While fans commented on these

articles, the content was driven more by journalists and there was no real invitation to fans to engage in dialogue about the subject matter of the articles.

In contrast to the live commentary described in the previous section, these articles and professional analyses were written by BBC journalists about events on the pitch or more generally around the tournament. The articles usually went into more depth about the results of games or the performance of players and coaches and also covered controversies and news that broke during the tournament. The BBC Africa team used Facebook to provide real time status updates about results, to report from press conferences and to convey news about players and injuries, which were then linked to longer analysis pieces on the BBC website. There were 94 links to the BBC Africa news site from Facebook during AFCON 13. As the transfer window for European teams ended on 30<sup>th</sup> January, transfers of players between clubs was a typical subject for articles, and there was a lot of this type of news in the first week of the tournament.

Two examples are given below:

In the last 20 years many African football players have become firm fixtures at most top European clubs. Now talent hunters are in South Africa looking for the next African superstar, during the Cup of Nations. The BBC's Alex South spoke to agent Mike Makkab, from South Africa's ProSport International, and scout Lutz Pfannenstiel, from German club TSG Hoffenheim.<sup>67</sup>

Manchester City have signed Ghanaian striker Godsway Donyoh from the country's Right to Dream Academy<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> <<https://www.facebook.com/LoveAfricanFootball/posts/298711706918380>> 4th February 2013, Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015.

<sup>68</sup> <<https://www.facebook.com/LoveAfricanFootball/posts/229983833805926>> 31st January 2013, Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015.

In addition, many news items were about the various teams' player line-ups before matches, including reasons for changes in line-ups, such as suspensions or injuries.

Caf confirms that Togo's Serge Akakpo NOT Dare Nibombe is suspended for quarter-final v Burkina Faso on Sunday in Nelspruit #BBCAfcon<sup>69</sup>

Posting articles on Facebook might be seen as just another way to publish articles. However, audiences still have the opportunity to comment in the field below each article, opening articles to participation. It could be argued the reading of the article and the comments from fans constituted the news, not just the journalists' article. Despite the possibility for the audience to contribute, participation was low as these posts did not really invite fans to comment. The next section covers posts which encouraged participation by fans more.

#### **5.4.3 *Fan analysis* – Encouraging fan loyalty for increased engagement**

These posts encouraged fans of Love African Football to answer questions posted by the BBC team. Here the subsequent conversations deliberating the topics were directed more by fans than by BBC journalists.

Posts in which journalists tried to encourage fan analysis were the most popular in terms of both reach and engagement.<sup>70</sup> These posts involved the BBC team putting a question directly to the audience, asking for example which team they supported, which was the best player or who they thought would win AFCON 13. A few comments posted on Love African Football during AFCON 13 are given below:

*Who was your African Cup of Nations player of the tournament?*<sup>71</sup>

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69< <https://www.facebook.com/LoveAfricanFootball/posts/231250327012610>> 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013, Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015.

70 Defined by Facebook Analytics as 'clicking anywhere within the post, to read it, like it or to comment on it'

71 <<https://www.facebook.com/LoveAfricanFootball/posts/234801606657482>> 8<sup>th</sup> February 2013, 05.08 am GMT. Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015.

*Who are the stars of Afcon2013? Goalkeepers, Strikers or Defenders?*<sup>72</sup>

*Have we got the best 4 teams playing in the semi-finals?*<sup>73</sup>

Of a total of 477 posts, 102 contained a direct question addressed to Love African Football fans,<sup>74</sup> encouraging them to have their say. However, these questions were predominantly constructed in a way which attracted expressions of support for teams, players or nations rather than longer considered or reflective answers. They allowed fans to express plenty of loyalty, pride, emotions, expectations and disappointment, but not really any dialogue. There was no exploration of issues, no reciprocity and no listening, just statements: opinions that do not change because they are about support for a team, which cannot be questioned, just expressed. Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012) talk about affective news on social media in response to the events in Egypt 2011, when a lot of Twitter comments were expressions of solidarity. Similarly, these comments about AFCON 13 were affective of support for different teams. While the BBC team were in a way asking fans to add their analysis to the content, in most cases the fans did not. Perhaps in order to get more analysis they would have had to ask: *who is your favourite player and why?* However, the affection for African teams seen in other types of comments could also be understood as loyalty to Africa and seen as related to issues of globalisation, capitalism, European domination and identity, as the analysis in the next subsection shows.

#### **5.4.4 Debate topics – Deliberation of globalisation, politics and identity**

These were in-depth questions posted by the BBC Africa team aimed at starting a genuine debate or dialogue about topics concerning politics or social or economic

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72 <<https://www.facebook.com/LoveAfricanFootball/posts/230197737117869>> 1<sup>st</sup> February 2013, 12.00 pm GMT. Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015.

73 <<https://www.facebook.com/LoveAfricanFootball/posts/233181106819532>> 5<sup>th</sup> February 2013 5.12> 5<sup>th</sup> February 2013, 5.12 am GMT. Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015.

74 Fans of the page, i.e. those who have liked the page and see regular updates from BBC Love African Football.

issues in Africa. These topics were related to football but not strictly about it, and generated dialogue beyond the game.

Of the total of 477 posts during the tournament, 12 can be described as more in-depth debate posts addressing more in-depth questions and issues facing African football today, with the BBC team encouraging discussion or debate about the most important issues at stake. The majority of posts analysed previously mostly just expressed support for one football team or player, so I decided to pick the posts that generated more dialogue for further analysis. The posts and fan comments I chose to analyse further were: a) those which generated debate over and above mere expressions of support for football teams or players; and b) Facebook posts asking fans to debate the big issues facing African football which can be found in the literature and in news coverage of African football. In total 12 posts fitted this criterion, and despite this small number compared to the other types of posts, these threads of dialogue between producers and fans were those that most resembled democratic debate. The way debates on Love African Football encouraged participants across different African nations and the African diaspora to discuss issues of global politics, economics, equality, racism and social justice is evidence that online participation can foster more democratic forms of deliberation. As a result of their significance for analysing democratic debate, these conversations are analysed further in Chapter 6, which focuses on understanding the nature and quality of democratic debate. However, first here are some concluding words on the changing roles of producers and audiences.

## **5.5 Summary**

In this chapter I have shown a range of ways in which audiences are invited to contribute to BBC WS crowdmaps, comment on and discuss articles published on Facebook and answer questions posted by journalists on Twitter. Previous literature has demonstrated how the roles of producers and audiences blur into one as a result of the

emergence of online participatory tools (Jenkins 2006, Bruns 2011), while other authors have focused on gatekeeping functions and how the power of online and interactive journalism still remains with journalists (Singer 2006, Harrison 2009). Few studies so far have looked at how new participatory practices help producers, audiences and social media texts interact, and particularly not in the context of international broadcasting in countries of the Global South. The three mediated moments at the BBC African services studied in this thesis incorporate producers, audiences and text in one study and so fill a gap in the understanding of participatory practices at an international broadcaster. The key argument I outline here is that, although social media have made it easier for journalists and audiences to interact with each other, it is not simply that these tools give audiences the power to voice their opinion; instead, production and audience practices, journalistic cultures and legacies of domination and power by those who are seen as upholding facts and verified truths also play a significant role in participatory journalism.

At the time of my study, interactions with audiences at the BBC African services were moving away from highly controlled environments like phone-in programmes and pre-moderated online forums towards more open and un-edited participation on third party social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter.<sup>75</sup> In line with the technical medium for participation changing from BBC-controlled platforms to third party platforms, journalistic and audience practices were also changing. For example, allowing unverified content to be published on the BBC Nigerian Ushahidi map and the two-way conversation between journalists and participants on Love African Football were new practices at the BBC at the time. Despite this change, my observations also show that journalistic practices tended to adjust at a slower pace than the technology, as staff kept on trying to adjust new platforms to old ways of working. The legacy of journalistic gatekeeping and the slow adoption of new editorial values fit for purpose in a

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<sup>75</sup> The BBC now also uses Instagram and WhatsApp as participatory platforms.

participatory environment in some instances limited the development of further audience participation.

My study of both the BBC Nigerian Election Map and the launch of BBC Africa Debate show that the strict selection of participants and posts and the formatting of audience contributions mean that democratic deliberation is limited, especially on the BBC's own platforms. BBC Africa Debate shows that journalists want knowledge-based rather than opinion-based participation. I argue that there is no strict distinction between opinion and fact, and the false premise that there is limits equality in participation in BBC Africa debates. The value system of impartiality and balance at the BBC African services prevents initiatives which put non-professionals in charge of news content because journalists fear that as a result they will break the norm and damage audience trust in the BBC. I argue that the ideology of impartiality and balance is not value-free, but rather journalists use professional journalistic practices to construct facts and the context in which they make sense (Vasterman 2005).

In Chapter 2, I argued that participatory journalism can lead to more democratic forms of debate as long as media organisations like the BBC are willing and able to incorporate African participants' forms of expression, including personal narratives and storytelling (Young and Press 2000). Previous research has shown that aesthetic affective modes of expression including storytelling and rhetoric are important to allow marginalised voices to be heard and thus ensure fair representation of the African public in BBC WS coverage (Mouffe 1999, Young and Press 2000, Spitulnik 2003). For example, football fans demonstrated affective support for national teams when discussing football during AFCON 13, commenting and cheering for their team as if they were watching the game together. Unlike some predictions about social media debate, in this example Facebook was not an echo-chamber (Vickery 2009) because fans were not all supporting the same national teams. Love African Football on



Facebook allows cross-national and transnational communicative spaces for football, although at the same time the fan forum was dismissed as just football and therefore not treated as a core part of the BBC WS's news offering.

I argue that in order for BBC Africa to operate in a participatory news environment with many different voices being expressed, it is important to move away from strict interpretations of impartiality and objective news values (Mouffe 1992). The news values that prevail on social media include more aesthetic affective modes of expression (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012) and the BBC WS needed to adapt to this environment, not only to become more inclusive but also to stay relevant in a new social media-driven news environment. However, the strict guardianship of content by journalists that I observed meant that there was very little risk that un-democratic content in the form of abusive comments would be published, something that has been shown to be an increasing problem on social media platforms in recent years.

Allowing further audience participation provides an opportunity to foster media citizenship through African audience participation. Media citizenship means that everyone, irrespective of national, cultural, class, gender or other belonging, has the right to both receive information and express opinions and be represented fairly in the media (Murdock 1994). Participatory media could potentially help to fulfil media citizenship in various parts of Africa by facilitating the right to express opinions in the form of democratic deliberation, but also by ensuring fair representation due to an increased plurality of voices heard in the media. For example, if it is possible to engage people through participatory technology, crowdsourcing of news has the opportunity to extend the geographic spread of reporting and thus allow wider representation, as shown by the Ushahidi Nigeria Votes map, which managed to extend reporting about the election beyond Nigeria's three main urban centres.

All three case studies show that participatory spaces are moving towards being separate from the main BBC news platforms and therefore also distant from the core BBC news agenda. However, although social media are separate from traditional BBC platforms, they are communicative spaces where producers and audiences meet. Audience comments on a story might change the original meaning of the article, while audience contributions mean that the content and its meaning are never really finished. For example, fans respond to BBC questions and articles on Love African Football, but it is the overall article, with all the audience's comments (on average 409 per post) that becomes the news. The lines between producers and audiences are thus blurred because both producers and audiences co-create what ultimately forms the football fan community. A space where news can be commented on and publicly discussed creates new forms of hybrid news space (Hermida and Thurman 2008), spaces where both journalists and the public influence each other so it is not possible to distinguish professional from citizen journalism. Many different kinds of participation and conversations that the BBC cannot control take place in such spaces, and in fact the BBC is just one of many participants who produce content and communicate in this hybrid space, including other news organisations, bloggers, professionals and individuals.

# Chapter 6 — The Nature and Quality of Mediated Democratic Debate

## 6.1 Introduction - the nature and quality of mediated democratic debate in practice

This chapter addresses the core theoretical question of this thesis: *What constitutes a democratic debate and how can we recognise its nature and quality?* To be able to address empirically how participatory journalism might contribute to deliberative democracy (as outlined in Chapter 2), I return to the three mediated moments to consider the barriers to and opportunities for democratic debate I witnessed during my fieldwork.

Before going into the details of my empirical findings it is worth briefly returning to the theoretical framework of dialogic deliberation discussed in Chapter 2, which uses deliberative democracy and pluralist democracy theory as a lens to understand whether participatory journalism is really participatory and if it therefore allows more democratic forms of deliberation. The characteristics of dialogic deliberation I have identified in previous research and theoretical argument are: a) a debate that permits storytelling and personal narratives that embrace aesthetic affective modes of communication; b) reciprocity and listening from both producers and audiences; c) mutual exploration and self-reflection, which can ensure that when marginalised groups in Africa are speaking, producers are able to listen and explore issues together with the audience; and finally d) freedom from commercial or administrative control of content and debates. These criteria are intended to serve as a critical framework to help evaluate the democratic qualities of participatory journalism.

Chapter 5 explored the blurred boundaries between producers and audiences and illustrated how participation is not always compatible with the journalistic values of news practitioners, who see themselves as gatekeepers who should control the news. This chapter takes the argument about produsage further in order to understand the implications of the new roles of producers and audiences in democratic deliberation, particularly in the case of audiences in the Global South, in Sub-Saharan Africa.

This chapter is about the nature and quality of democratic debate and is structured in the following way:

Section 6.2 looks at how actual citizen reports to the Nigeria Votes initiative on the Ushahidi crowdmapping platform were edited by BBC journalists, and critically explores the intersection between journalistic gatekeeping and allowing personal stories and storytelling to be heard (Young and Press 2000, Ryfe 2006). This case study is an attempt to understand whether the BBC's strict editorial guidelines hinder or enable democratic debate.

Section 6.3 looks at conversations taking place on the social networking platform Twitter around the monthly radio programme BBC Africa Debate, broadcast from a different location in Africa each time. The analysis is aimed at critically understanding whether conversations about BBC Africa Debate topics are inclusive and equal and whether there are signs of reciprocity, ideal role taking and listening, in line with theories of a pluralist diverse and equal public sphere (Habermas 1991, Dahlberg 2005, Escobar 2011). In short, is BBC Africa Debate a participatory democratic space?

Section 6.4 focuses on critically understanding whether debates about football which take place among the Love African Football Facebook fan community can foster an inclusive space where fans can express aesthetic affective modes of communication. Can the space avoid being just an echo-chamber for like-minded individuals who

support the same team (Young and Press 2000, Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012), and instead provide a mediated space where cross-national issues are related to globalisation, loyalty and African and diasporic identities and where difference is an essential part of dialogue? (Mouffe 2009)

## **6.2 Crowd mapping an Election – an edited debate**

In this chapter I return to the Nigerian election map initiative, but instead of focusing on the journalistic practices of verification discussed in Chapter 5, I analyse the way in which posts were included, excluded or edited before being put on the BBC Nigeria Votes Ushahidi map. This analysis examines the mechanisms of producer-led versus audience-led editing in a crowdsourced environment in order to understand if there is a shift towards more democratic forms of debate.

In Dahlberg's (Dahlberg 2001) adaptation of Habermas's communicative rationality framework, one of the criteria for open and fair debate is discursive inclusion and equality, which is achieved by limiting any formal or informal inequalities within discourse. Here I apply the idea of discursive equality to assess the editing of audience contributions to the Nigerian election map, where different forms of professional editing of audience contributions can be seen as inequalities within discourse. For example, not allowing reports through because they have language errors could be seen as a formal restriction on debate.

My analysis shows that three different forms of editing took place. First, some posts were excluded for not being sufficiently relevant or for not answering the BBC's call to action: 'we're asking you to send us your photos and reports of what is happening in your area'. Second, mistakes in language and spelling in some citizen reports were edited for readability. Third, potentially controversial posts that supported one candidate or talked about election corruption were either edited or were not included on the map

at all. This section summarises my analysis of the editing of reports contributed by citizens to the Ushahidi Nigeria Votes Map.

Many of the changes made to the audience-generated reports published on the map included spelling and grammar edits. According to the editors working on the map, spelling and grammar changes were made in order to improve comprehension (fieldnotes, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011). Research at BBC news has previously shown that editors want to 'provide users with a good edited read' (Mike Smartt, founding editor, BBC News website, interview 2004 in Thurman (2008: 144) by 'correcting bad spelling and putting capital letters in where there should be' (interview with Pete Clifton, editor, BBC News website, 2004 in Thurman (2008). However, what is interesting about the Nigeria 2011 coverage is that not all posts were edited for spelling and grammar, and some posts were edited in some places but not throughout the entire post. According to the map's editors, this was intended to keep as much as possible of the natural language of those writing but still make sure that posts could be understood (fieldnotes, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011).

The following examples highlight the variation in the editing of linguistic issues in reports published on the BBC Nigeria Ushahidi map on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011. While some editing was done to nearly half of published posts, some posts with obvious spelling and grammatical mistakes were published without being edited. Table 6.1 below provides an example of a post which was not edited before being posted on the Ushahidi map. The post contains, 'i av', instead of 'I have', an error or colloquial expression which appears in both the original post and the report that went up on the map. In addition, the place name 'oke-aro area' appears without a capital O in both versions of the post. It can be argued that the post is readable without editing and therefore it has been published with errors in it. Posts are edited in order to make comprehension easier, but an editor explained to me that the aim of editing was also to keep posts in-line with the

language and style intended by contributors, hence some language mistakes were kept in (fieldnotes, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011). Including language errors in audience reports contributes to more discursive equality because more people can have their voices heard.

Audience Contribution	Post on Ushahidi Map <sup>76</sup>
<p>'i av just been accredited. I can only see less than 100 people hanging around till voting time. I'm at the school compound, oke-aro area, under ifo local govt, Ogun State.'</p> <p>Source: BBC Africa Have Your Say Facebook 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011</p>	<p>'i av just been accredited. I can only see less than 100 people hanging around till voting time. I'm at the school compound, oke-aro area, under ifo local govt, Ogun State.'</p> <p>Source: 2011 BBC Nigeria 2011 Crowd Map &lt;<a href="https://bbcnigeria2011.crowdmap.com/reports/view/21">https://bbcnigeria2011.crowdmap.com/reports/view/21</a>&gt;</p>

*Table 6.1 — Nigeria Votes Audience Contribution*

Editing posts for comprehension but without correcting language errors was an attempt to allow the voices of the public to be heard without imposing restrictions on the debate. The quality of the language in the debates was less controversial than the fear of potentially contentious or partisan content being submitted by audiences. The journalists participating in my study were most worried about compromising the BBC's balance and impartiality.

### **6.2.1 Balance and impartiality versus equality in participation**

From a BBC editorial point of view, one condition for the crowd map to be allowed to go ahead was that any potentially contentious or undemocratic content was not to be included. Several meetings between senior BBC management, the social media editor and the BBC Africa editor were held to discuss the potential pitfalls of the crowdmap

<sup>76</sup> Posted on Ushahidi map 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011 <<https://bbcnigeria2011.crowdmap.com/reports/view/21>> Accessed 9th February 2015.

(fieldnotes, March 14<sup>th</sup> 2011). Section 10 of the BBC's editorial guidelines: Politics, Public Policy and Polls – Principles provides the fundamental values BBC journalists must follow when reporting on foreign elections:

10.2.1 We must treat matters of politics and public policy with due accuracy and impartiality in news and other output.

10.2.2 We must not express an opinion on current affairs or matters of public policy other than broadcasting or the provision of online services.

10.2.3 We must not campaign, or allow ourselves to be used to campaign (BBC 2015: Editorial Guidelines 10.2.1-10.2.3).

The guidelines stress the importance of impartiality and of not expressing any opinion in political reporting, emphasising that the BBC must not be used as a campaign platform. Impartiality, particularly around elections, has a democratic purpose and is seen as supporting free elections. Section 10.4.21 of the BBC's editorial guidelines also gives specific advice with respect to overseas elections:

The principles of fairness and due impartiality that underlie our coverage of UK elections should also inform our election reporting in other countries. When we report elections overseas we may need to take into account the circumstances under which the particular election is being held, especially where serious questions are raised about the openness or fairness of the electoral process. Additional issues may arise when BBC content is aimed at an audience within the country where an election is taking place. We owe a special responsibility to audiences who are about to vote. We may need to consider the timing of the re-transmission on international services of programmes originally made for the UK audience, the closer to the election date, the greater the need for care according



to the guidelines. If it is considered that a programme could have an undue and unfair influence on the election, then we should delay transmission until after polling (BBC 2015: BBC Editorial Guidelines 10.4.21).

The guidelines express the BBC's intention not to influence overseas voters in any way and state that transmissions could be delayed until after polling if there is a possibility that reporting could influence audiences who are about to vote. Is it possible for participatory journalism to be dialogic and allow for mutuality and exploration if editorial controls are too strict, for example during an election? Rules are not necessarily undemocratic, but there is potentially a fine balance between managing forums so strictly that no real debate can take place and just providing an environment that is free from confrontation. Freire (2000) argues that dialogue cannot have firm rules because it is about learning and should therefore not be controlled by one authority. Instead, dialogue is about creative participation amongst peers (Freire 2000). As this research is about democratic debate it is important to understand what it is, but it is equally important to establish what constitutes undemocratic debate, as discussed by (Escobar 2011). Signifiers of undemocratic debate include:

'exchanging of monologues, pre-packaged arguments, dominant voices, posturing, specialized jargon, avoidance of difficult issues, tokenism, polarization, and confrontational exchange' (Escobar 2011:12).

The following paragraphs focus on posts sent in to the crowdmap that could potentially have been contentious.

Six of the reports published on the map were edited because they contained references to partisanship. The social media editor working on the day was worried about contentious content and did not want to include anything that could cause tension between supporters of different political parties or people from different sides of the

north-south divide or from different Nigerian tribes (fieldnotes, email from social media editor 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011). The two tables below provide examples of reports that were edited because they included contentious content according to the map editor. The first gave support for one candidate whilst the second was contentious because it alluded to Nigeria's north-south divide.

The following two reports in table 6.2 and 6.3 give support to incumbent presidential candidate Goodluck Jonathan. The first part of the audience report below in table 6.2 has been kept intact. However, from the second sentence onwards the contributor says (in italic font in table x below) – 'Everybody seems to mobilize for Jonathan. Though I couldn't stay for the vote to be counted; I think Jonathan will get 99.9% of the valid vote from this ward and across the state', which has been edited out. The member of the public who posted this report is not strictly sticking to the question about what is happening in their area, but is instead making predictions about the outcome of the election, which might call the impartiality of the BBC into question. Instead of posting the full report, the editor included a shorter and more neutral version of the audience member's contribution. No indication is given that the audience post has been edited by professional editors, which calls into question the truthfulness and transparency of audience participation.

Audience Contribution	Post on Ushahidi Map
<p>'At Polling unit 04/16/14/028, Ogboefere market Okpoko, Onitsha, Anambra state, everything went on well and ended well. Large voters turn up. <i>Everybody seems to mobilize for Jonathan. Though I couldn't stay for the vote to be counted, I think Jonathan will get 99.9% of the valid vote from this ward and across the state.</i>'</p> <p>Source: BBC Africa Have Your Say 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011</p>	<p>'At Polling unit 04/16/14/028, Ogboefere market Okpoko, Onitsha, Anambra state. Everything went on well and ended well. Large voters turn up.'</p> <p>Source: BC Nigeria 2011 Crowdmapp  <a href="https://bbcnigeria2011.crowdmap.com/reports/view/60">https://bbcnigeria2011.crowdmap.com/reports/view/60</a> 16th April 2011</p>

Table 6.2 — Nigeria Votes Audience Contribution

In the next example, table 6.3, the audience member's post reads 'I have cased my vote for good luck jonathan' whilst in the BBC edited post the section about who the respondent had voted for is edited out: 'I have casted my vote...'. The fact that the post is edited is marked with three dots ('...') to show that there was something there prior to editing.

Audience Contribution	Post on Ushahidi Map
<p>'Am at unit 3, ward 3 patani town delta state. I have casted my vote <i>for goodluck jonathan</i>, Large turnout of voters and voting is peaceful'</p> <p>Source: BBC Africa Have Your Say 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011</p>	<p>'I am at unit 3, ward 3 patani town delta state. I have casted my vote... Large turnout of voters and voting is peaceful'</p> <p>Source: BBC Nigeria 2011 Crowdmapp  <a href="https://bbcnigeria2011.crowdmap.com/reports/view/31">https://bbcnigeria2011.crowdmap.com/reports/view/31</a> 16th April 2011</p>

Table 6.3 — Nigeria Votes Audience Contribution

The post below talks about people voting for Goodluck Jonathan because he is from the south. The text that was edited out is in italics in the table below. The version of the post inserted on the Ushahidi map states support for Goodluck Jonathan but leaves out the part where the audience participant says, ‘They say they’re not voting pdp but Jonathan. When u ask why, the response is that he’s from the South.’ This section could potentially be contentious because it talks about support for a southern candidate and therefore alludes to the division between north and south in Nigeria.

Audience Contribution	Post on Ushahidi Map
<p>‘Heavy security presence. Peaceful voting. Most people here seem charged up to vote Jonathan. <i>They say they're not voting pdp but Jonathan. When u ask why, the response is that he's from the South.</i>At Garrick memorial secondary school, everything's peaceful, and turnout is good.’</p> <p>Source: BBC World Service Facebook 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011</p>	<p>‘Heavy security presence. Peaceful voting. Most people here seem charged up to vote Jonathan. At Garrick memorial secondary school, everything’s peaceful, and turnout is good.’</p> <p>Source: BBC Nigeria 2011 Crowdmap <a href="https://bbcnigeria2011.crowdmap.com/reports/view/51">https://bbcnigeria2011.crowdmap.com/reports/view/51</a> 16th April 2011</p>

Table 6.4 — Nigeria Votes Audience Contribution

I also analysed 19 reports posted on BBC Africa’s Facebook page that were not included on the Ushahidi map. According to editors, one of the main reasons for not including posts was that there was not enough location information identifying where the person was writing the report (fieldnotes, April 16<sup>th</sup> 2011). The location information that needed to be included in order for the producer to place the content on the map was a place (a town, village or polling station) and a state. A lack of location information was the reason for not including posts in nine of the 19 reports which were not included on the map. Another reason for non-inclusion was if the person sending the report was not present in Nigeria; those who wrote in from countries other than Nigeria were not

included on the map even if the person originated from Nigeria. Their comments could not be placed on the map either as it was meant to illustrate what was happening around polling stations in Nigeria. Thus the global Nigerian diaspora was excluded from the BBC debate about the Nigerian election, despite their stake in politics in Nigeria and their potential future role in democratisation processes in the country. Finally, some reports were not included on the map at all because they contained contentious content. These posts mostly had issues related to those mentioned in the BBC's editorial guidelines about the extra caution needed when there are concerns about the openness and fairness of an election process (BBC 2015: BBC Editorial Guidelines 10.4.21).

Some posts that were not included stated a lack of belief in the election system and the security situation on election day. A report from a member of the Nigerian public on the BBC WS Facebook page expressed the view that the election had already been concluded the previous night. This post is likely to have been edited out because its criticism of the election process could have been contentious:

At practising polling centre, Emene Enugu state Eastern Nigeria accreditation was peaceful but many people may not come back for voting as almost everybody are complaining for one reason or the other. Many men and some observes are bussy drinking at a bar very close to the polling unit, when asked some the reason they are not taking part in the poll they said that election has been concluded last night and they are voting their belly as they wait for the result.

The social media editor explained in an email summary of the day, 'We received very few allegations of corruption – any remotely contentious content was not placed on the map' (email from social media editor 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011). There were very few allegations

of corruption in the posts that came in and few were edited out, however the post above fell into the category of contentious content. I argue here that too much editing of participatory journalism leads to inequality in debates, and the Nigerian election crowdmap was heavily edited. However, I also agree that there needs to be caution about ensuring that the BBC's social media platforms do not serve as political campaigning platforms. Apart from potentially putting too many restrictions on participation and thus preventing equality in debates, heavy control, editing and strict framing of debates also meant that editors themselves thought that participants' contributions were benign and lacked news value.

Media content is usually edited by professional storytellers to make sure that it is readable, interesting and attention grabbing. It is a skill to use keywords, headlines and even sensationalism to make something appear interesting. Summing up coverage of election day on the Ushahidi map in an email sent to the team, the social media editor in charge referred to the content coming in from members of the public as 'benign': 'Most of the reports were benign, not requiring us to place too much strain on the Nigeria Desk for verification' (email from social media editor 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011). For example, the few photographs that came in from the public showed people standing peacefully in line waiting to vote. Benign in this content also meant not interesting or newsworthy.



*Picture 6.1. Voters queuing in Lekki, Lagos. Source: sent in via email to the BBC by Ebi Bozimo 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011.*

*Source: <<https://bbcnigeria2011.crowdmap.com/reports/view/33>> Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> April 2011.*

I argue that the reports on the map could never have been anything other than benign when so much effort was put into them not being contentious. The BBC editor was clearly in control of what was published on the Nigeria votes Ushahidi map, thus limiting the depth and range of contributions to the crowdmapping initiative. Instead of trying to control the news flow, social media provides new ways to build narratives through timelines (on Facebook) and hashtags (on Twitter). Chapter 2 discussed the importance of allowing personal stories and narratives to be included in democratic debate, referring to Young and Press (2000) and Ryfe (2006). Section 6.3 explores Twitter's role in allowing audiences' stories to be included in BBC Africa Debate through the use of hashtags, retweets and mentions.

### **6.3 BBC Africa Debate on Twitter**

BBC Africa Debate is audience-led partly because it uses Twitter to engage with audiences. Chapter 5 discusses the barriers to participation in the new audience-led

BBC Africa Debate programme on BBC WS radio, and here I build on this analysis by demonstrating in more detail the mechanisms of audience participation in the show taking place on Twitter. Millions of audience members listen to the debate via shortwave, medium wave and FM partnership radio stations,<sup>77</sup> many of whom are unable to participate on Twitter as they lack access to the Internet, as discussed in Chapter 4. However, despite this lack of access, hundreds of Twitter users were able to get involved in the debates, as shown in Chart 6.1 below. Before going into more detail about reciprocity and dialogue in the use of Twitter hashtags, I will provide a short introduction detailing the number of tweets made and the ebb and flow of participation I saw during my observations of BBC Africa Debate and #bbcafricadebate which indicates the power dynamics of the inclusion of audience participants' voices in the debate.

### **6.3.1 BBC Africa Debate – equality and inclusion on Twitter**

The chart below shows the daily number of tweets mentioning BBC Africa Debate. The titles in the chart state the name and date of the radio programmes, with the X axis showing the number of tweets per day and the Y axis showing the date. The chart shows that the number of tweets referring to Africa Debate increases a few days before transmission, peaks on the day the programme is broadcast and then dies down a few days later.

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<sup>77</sup> The producers of the programme estimate the audience figure at around 20 million listeners across Africa.



## Africa Debate number of tweets per day 1<sup>st</sup> March–26<sup>th</sup> June 2012

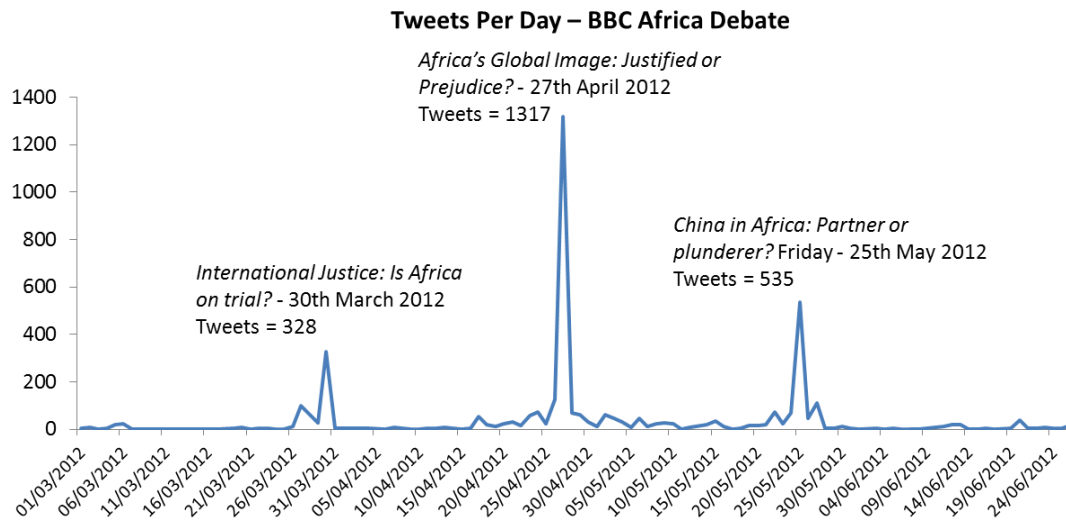


Chart 6.1. Source: Sysomos map, BBC World Service in-house data. Data accessed 26<sup>th</sup> June 2012, chart produced in excel by author.

For the first programme I analysed, *International Justice: Is Africa on Trial?*, the number of tweets did not start to intensify until 26<sup>th</sup> March, peaked on 30<sup>th</sup> March, the day of the broadcast, and tailed off quickly after 31<sup>st</sup> March, one day after the show. Thus, a total of 542 tweets about the programme were analysed, captured between 26<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> March.

For the second programme, *Africa's Global Image: Justified or Prejudice?*, the number of tweets intensified on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, five days before the programme was broadcast. Tweets about the topic started declining on 28th April, the day after the show, and then finally died down on 30th April. The total number of tweets for the period 23<sup>rd</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> April was 1756.

For the third programme, *China in Africa: Partner or Plunderer?*, the number of tweets started increasing around 19<sup>th</sup> May, six days before the programme was broadcast on 25<sup>th</sup> May, and died down on 28<sup>th</sup> May, three days after the broadcast. Chart x below

shows those days and the spike in tweets on 25<sup>th</sup> May, the day of the programme. The total number of tweets between 19<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> May was 919.

The peaks in activity on Twitter around transmission days indicate that activity on social media was largely driven by the radio programme and its producers. It also shows the immediacy of a medium where conversations trend and then die out quickly. According to Kwak et al.'s research on Twitter data over time, topics on Twitter usually die out within one week (2010), although some topics last longer than a month, for example, the Big Brother TV programme which has several episodes (Kwak, Lee et al. 2010). Similarly, although BBC Africa Debate has short active periods, debates come back to life at the time of the monthly transmission of the radio programme. Thus the debates are not self-sustaining; the BBC team picks the debates and drives conversations by linking the debates to transmission of the radio programme. The Africa Debate production team attributes the active Twitter periods around the programmes to the effort they put in on social media just before and during the radio show, writing tweets and re-tweeting audience comments, and tweeting more frequently nearer the time of the transmission. This finding is important because it demonstrates the relationship between the BBC radio producers and the Twitter audience and shows that the Twitter conversations are indeed examples of participatory journalism because they were producing content together.

The location and context of the show mattered for whether the topic trended in certain locations and with whom. The BBC Africa Debate show travelled around and was broadcast from a different African location each month. Social media analytics from Sysomos (explained in Chapter 3) show that Twitter activity from different countries depends on the country from which the show was being broadcast. For example, when the *Africa Image* programme was broadcast from Kampala in Uganda, the percentage of tweeters from Uganda rose from 4.3% to 7.8% directly after the programme. This

might not seem like a large jump, but the majority of tweeters talking about BBC Africa Debate are actually situated outside Africa, in the UK and USA, so it is significant when the percentage of participants from one African nation doubles. A great deal of tweeters from the UK and USA are from the African diaspora, and when the show was broadcast from Kampala, for example, many of the diaspora tweeters originated from Uganda.<sup>78</sup>

The other factor affecting the Twitter interest per radio show was the topic of the broadcast, with the international justice debate, for example, attracting many international lawyers (fieldnotes 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012). This finding shows that the relevance of debates has great importance for building a potential for democratic debate, as does who is represented.

My findings show that despite producers' willingness to engage as many people as possible in their social media debates, it is mainly crowd sourced elites who drive and maintain the debates on Twitter. Although there is no real bias towards elite organisations or individuals within Twitter's functionality, with tweets appearing organically in users' news feeds, elite organisations and individuals like the BBC, referred to by Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012: 9) as 'crowdsourced elites', tend to feature more prominently in the news stream. Individuals (journalists, bloggers, those working for NGO's or charities) are often awarded elite status through retweets by others which give their tweets more prominence than those of other individuals.

Not only were BBC Africa Debate producers aware of the influence of crowdsourced elites, they also took advantage of these influential tweeters by contacting bloggers and other influential Twitter users or organisations with a strong Twitter presence, asking them to tweet about the BBC Africa debates as they were taking place (fieldnotes 12<sup>th</sup> May 2012). These individuals and organisations were contacted because they had an interest in the topics being discussed and had many followers who might be interested

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<sup>78</sup> This data was analysed by going through Twitter accounts and reading bios, which often not only say where the tweeter lives but also where they are from.

in the debates. During the programme *Africa's Global Image: Justified or Prejudice?* on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2012, the team made a more conscious effort than for previous debates to target bloggers and social media personalities (fieldnotes 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012). The producers also invited these influential tweeters to take part in the debate in the studio so they could live tweet from the show and thus contribute to increased Twitter activity on that day. By giving the BBC access to their followers, these bloggers and influencers became the gatekeepers of the debates. The prominence of crowdsourced elites also shows that inequality and social difference prevails on Twitter, despite the supposed equality in representation on the platform (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012).

Those involved in these debates often have more followers than the BBC African services social media accounts. When discussing power and equality in the BBC Africa debates on Twitter, perhaps the dominant voice is not the BBC WS but instead those with more influence on social media, the crowdsourced elites. It is clear that Twitter is not an equal playing field where everyone gets equal representation, and BBC Africa is one influential voice amongst others in debates about Africa on the platform. The next section looks further at the balance between the activity of the BBC African services and that of the audience when they were interacting around three BBC Africa Debate topics in 2012.

### **6.3.2 Reciprocity and dialogue using hashtags, retweets and mentions**

As discussed in Chapter 2, important aspects of democratic debate are reciprocity, respect and ideal role taking (Dahlberg 2001, Escobar 2011). Previous studies of Twitter have shown that the platform is low in reciprocity because the majority of users do not have ongoing links or relationships with each other. Previous research has shown that only 22.1 % of users have a reciprocal on-going relationship (Kwak, Lee et al. 2010), much lower than for other comparable social networks such as Facebook

and Instagram. Kwak et al. (2010) thus conclude that Twitter is a source of information rather than a social networking site, and despite the organisation's efforts to make the platform more relational, many subsequent studies have confirmed that Twitter is a broadcast rather than a conversational medium.<sup>79</sup>

Contrary to these findings, my study shows that BBC Africa Debate on Twitter shows signs of reciprocity and ongoing dialogue between participants and the BBC. I demonstrate this by looking at the different ways Twitter users are able to exchange messages with each other and with the BBC about BBC Africa Debate topics using hashtags – #, retweets – RT and mentions – @ as summarised in the next three subsections.

### **6.3.3 # Hashtags allow the audience to contribute to BBC Africa Debate**

To understand the balance of power between BBC journalists and the public on Twitter, I analysed the hashtag used for BBC Africa Debate – #bbcafricadebate.<sup>80</sup> The majority of conversation about BBC Africa Debate programmes was generated by its audience rather than by professional BBC journalists working on the programme. The data shows that a relatively small proportion of tweets referring to the hashtag were generated by official BBC or BBC journalists' accounts, meaning that it was not just BBC producers who were driving and sustaining the debate about the programmes' themes. Only 10.3% tweets between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 26<sup>th</sup> June 2012 were posted by eight BBC Twitter accounts, including three official BBC Africa accounts and five personal accounts belonging to BBC Africa journalists, the rest coming from the audience. BBC journalists' tweets (originals and retweets combined) amounted to 30% of the total of 4075 messages about BBC Africa Debate generated during my fieldwork

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<sup>79</sup> Article in the New Yorker discussing technical issues preventing Twitter from becoming conversational. <<http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-end-of-twitter>> Accessed 16th October 2016.

<sup>80</sup> The data set that formed the basis for this analysis was compiled by identifying messages using certain keywords as being part of BBC Africa debate. These were: 'africa debate', 'africadebate', '#bbcafricadebate' and 'bbc africa debate'. Most tweets (94%) used #bbcafricadebate in order to take part in the debate.

period. The other tweets about BBC Africa Debate were posted by as many as 1912 different accounts held by individuals and other organisations, including news outlets, charities, NGOs, bloggers etc. This shows that there was a wide pool of contributors to BBC Africa Debate on Twitter, beyond the professional journalists.

My research shows that debates on Twitter benefit from being linked with other conversation streams through the use of alternative hashtags. The debate on Africa's image, for example, benefitted from the fact that another debate about Africa's image was taking place on Twitter using the hashtag #africarising. In December 2011, an Economist magazine front cover was dedicated to Africa's economic growth, titled 'Africa Rising'.<sup>81</sup> In addition, a number of news articles, blog articles and books had already been dedicated to the notion of Africa Rising, and the BBC Africa team was able to revive this debate and link it to the BBC Africa Debate hashtag about Africa's image. As a result, famous African musicians, artists and actors, some with many followers, got involved in the Twitter debate, which therefore increased the reach of the BBC Africa Debate programme. The audience's ability to have a say on Twitter, and therefore to influence the way the debate about Africa's image was framed, is of great importance for more democratic forms of broadcasting. An important lesson for journalists which emerges from my research is to not treat topics in isolation, but rather to link to the wider network of topics and conversations taking place on social media.

Many tweeters who took part in the hashtagged conversation were loyal followers of BBC Africa Debate on Twitter, as illustrated by the fact that nearly a third (32%) of tweeters used the Africa Debate hashtag more than once during my fieldwork period, some up to 10 times. The large number of tweets from many different Twitter participants indicates that an exchange of messages about the topics took place, rather than just a single coincidental retweet by a user who may have seen a tweet that

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81 The Economist, Africa Rising, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2011. <<http://www.economist.com/node/21541015>> Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

grabbed their attention and forwarded it on without really engaging with the topic or discussing the issue. The exchange of messages points to a potential environment of reciprocity where dialogue can flourish. Another indicator of a conversational environment on Twitter is the number of retweets associated with a topic.

#### **6.3.4 Retweets foster a conversational environment for BBC Africa Debate**

Previous studies of Twitter have shown that retweets indicate interest in a topic and trust in the originator, as well as likely agreement with the content of a tweet (Metaxas, Mustafaraj et al. 2014). My analysis shows that BBC Africa Debate generates a lot more retweets<sup>82</sup> than other comparable conversations taking place on Twitter,<sup>83</sup> with 59% of what was said about BBC Africa Debate being retweeted messages (2423 of 4075 tweets). Previous research on a random sample of approximately 50 million tweets (10% of all tweets worldwide at that time) collected from 26<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> November 2010 shows that the average proportion of retweets per day was only between 16.13% and 16.60%, much less than the 59% of retweets for BBC Africa Debate (Mustafaraj and Metaxas 2011).<sup>84</sup> Comparable studies have since estimated retweets at around 30% of tweets (Sun, Zhang et al. 2013), although this is still significantly lower than the ratio for BBC Africa debate.

However, Cha et al. (2010) argue that the main use of retweets is to spread information rather than to engage people in a conversation. If the majority of tweets are just the BBC promoting its own programme, these retweets cannot really be referred to as debate. Contrary to Cha et al., it has also previously been found that the reasons people give for retweeting are: to promote others' tweets; to get more followers; to

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82 An example of an original tweet by BBC Africa: *Tune in to the BBC World Service at 1900 GMT on Friday to listen to #bbcafricadebate discuss: #China in #Africa: Partner or plunderer?*; and a retweet: *RT @BBCAfrica Tune in to the BBC World Service at 1900 GMT on Friday to listen to #bbcafricadebate discuss: #China in #Africa: Partner or plunderer?*

83 A retweet (abbreviated as RT) is a term used on Twitter to mean tweeting content that has been previously posted by another user, thereby disseminating the tweet to one's own followers.

84 A slight caveat in the comparison is that Twitter introduced an automatic retweet button on 12th August 2010, which had reached wider adoption by 2012. Hence, retweeting of BBC Africa Debate benefitted from more established retweeting practices compared to the randomly collected data set from 2010.

reach new audiences; to have a conversation; as an act of loyalty; to promote or validate someone else; and to show friendship (Boyd, Golder et al. 2010). In addition, retweets can be used to create a context for conversations, as explained by (Golder and Lotan 2010):

Retweets can knit together tweets and provide a valuable conversational infrastructure. Whether participants are actively commenting or simply acknowledging that they're listening, they're placing themselves inside a conversation. Even when they are simply trying to spread a tweet to a broader audience, they are bringing people into a conversation (Golder and Lotan 2010: no page number).

In summary, therefore, retweets are used both for information diffusion and participation in a long-lasting conversation (Mustafaraj and Metaxas 2011). Both of these are beneficial to the BBC Africa team as they provide promotion for the programme and a way for audiences to take part in the debate beyond the programme broadcast respectively. According to its own market research, the BBC is seen as a trusted news organisation (BBCWS 2011) and my findings indicate that this trust in the BBC results in retweets and therefore a conversational environment for BBC Africa Debate.

Most retweets for the BBC Africa Debate programme *Africa's Image* (79%) came from the audience, indicating that the conversation was not just driven by BBC journalists. The large number of retweets from the public indicates that the debate was not just driven and controlled by the BBC, but that users were also debating the issues in the programmes with each other. Thus, professional BBC journalists did not dominate the conversation in a way that meant that citizens could not be heard. Not only did many non-journalists contribute to the debate, their voices also gained influence, as demonstrated in the table below, which shows the top ten retweets about the BBC



Africa Debate programme *Africa's Image*. This table shows that six of the top ten retweets were from non-BBC accounts.

Ranking	Retweet Content	Number of Retweets
1	RT @BBCWorld Pictures reveal how life in #Africa differs from many people's perceptions <a href="http://t.co/JKvK7Njp">http://t.co/JKvK7Njp</a> via @Jos***inter #bbcafricadebate	48
2	RT @DynamicAfrica Africa doesn't have an image problem the rest of the world has an ignorance problem. #bbcafricadebate	27
3	RT @To**la Does Africa need a rebranding or the world needs a re-orientation about Africa and her image? What's the solution? #bbcafricadebate	23
4	RT @BBCAfrica Author Wainana argues that if the world's view of #africa was accurate #Madonna would be its president <a href="http://t.co/iaQG6kgl">http://t.co/iaQG6kgl</a> #bbcafricadebate	17
5	RT @ma****ena Until Africa gets her own media houses that are globally viewed & appreciated western media will always SPEAK on our behalf #BBCAfricaDebate	12
6	RT @Rob***ai African media will never tell the African story when Xinhua Reuters AP and AFP are still their main agencies. #BBCAfricaDebate	10
7	RT @BBCAfricaHYS Which prominent African (except Mandela) has done most to change Africa's image in last 10yrs? #bbcafricadebate #imagechanger #africarising	9
8	RT @BBCAfrica Robert Kabushenga says Nollywood ! nobody cares about James Bond anymore .#bbcafricadebate	9
9	RT @ Rob***ai Western Media will never change the African story. We need strong African media to tell the African story. #BBCAfricaDebate	9

10	RT @DominickRolle RT @DynamicAfrica: Africa doesn't have an image problem the rest of the world has an ignorance problem. #bbcafricadebate	9
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*Table 6.5 – Top Retweets – BBC Africa Debate Africa's Global Image: Justified or Prejudice? 27th April 2012*

The table also shows that some of the more frequent retweets reframed the question posted by the BBC Africa team, posting instead: '*RT @To\*\*la Does Africa need a rebranding or the world needs a re-orientation about Africa and her image? What's the solution? #bbcafricadebate*', and '*RT @DynamicAfrica Africa doesn't have an image problem the rest of the world has an ignorance problem. #bbcafricadebate*'. The retweets and debates that took place on Twitter before and after the BBC Africa Debate programme raised important issues related to Africa's image and the international media's role in the problem of how Africa is perceived. The popular posts show that it is possible to reframe the debate by posting and get attention for alternative viewpoints through online deliberation.

Another important aspect of democratic debate covered in Chapter 2 relates to reciprocity and respect (Benhabib 1989). The following subsection argues that in order for deliberation to take place BBC journalists must listen and reciprocate in conversation with the public on Twitter.

### **6.3.5 @ mentions - a deliberative tool to foster reciprocity on twitter**

My study shows that tweeters were able to talk to BBC journalists and each other by using the mention function (@)<sup>85</sup> and that they therefore had the option of building reciprocity and showing respect to others involved in the debate. The @ sign is a marker of addressivity that links back to the Twitter account which is mentioned (Zelenkauskaitė and Herring 2008, Honey and Herring 2009). Being able to address

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<sup>85</sup> When posting a tweet, user names accompanied by the '@' symbol can be included anywhere in the text, which is another way of taking part in a debate: 'a mention is any Twitter update that contains "@username" anywhere in the body of the Tweet'. <<https://support.twitter.com/articles/14023-what-are-replies-and-mentions#>> Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

BBC producers directly on Twitter means that a conversation between the BBC and the public can be maintained, which has significance for the feasibility of dialogue on Twitter. Below is an example of a reply to @bbcafricahys:

@BBCAfricaHYS The #bbcafricadebate on #Africasimage should note one thing: #Africa can't improve by being reminded of her many shortcomings.

For nearly all BBC Africa Debate programmes I studied on Twitter, the majority of conversations using mentions were between tweeters rather than with BBC producers. For example, 64% of all mentions for the programme *Africa's Image* were conversations among other tweeters, thus more conversation for that debate was between tweeters and independent of professional journalists. The programme with the least mentions directed at the BBC was *China and Africa Relations*.

The example given below in table 6.6 shows a conversation between participants in a Twitter debate using the mention function (@) and quoting #bbcafricadebate.<sup>86</sup>

A reply to @MrBa*** about the Africa Image debate	@MrBa*** i also find the debates rather useless too. #BBCAfricaDebate its nothing but further exploitation of Africans
A reply to @Augustine**** and @***horner about the China and Africa debate.	@Augustine*** @***horner Say what? Senegal's economy prior to IMF investment/aid ring a bell? D facts r on ground. #BBCAfricaDebate

Table 6.6 — Extracts of Twitter debate

The tweeters address each other, agreeing or disagreeing, showing that audiences were not just responding to the BBC but instead the conversation was open for participants to discuss and debate amongst themselves. My study therefore shows that members of the public on Twitter had conversations with each other about

<sup>86</sup> Usernames have been edited using \* in order to preserve Twitter users' anonymity.

#bbcafricadebate topics using the mention function, indicating that the programme initiated online deliberation which was not necessarily controlled by BBC journalists.

Escobar (2011) emphasises the importance of reciprocity in debates, and although tweeters can respond to the BBC there is little evidence of the BBC using mentions to respond to the audience on Twitter. In addition, few comments from Twitter were actually read out on the BBC Africa Debate radio programme, indicating that there was little reciprocity from the BBC in relation to debates using #bbcafricadebate. The Facebook page Love African Football, run by BBC Africa and BBC Sport, shows more evidence of dialogue between journalists and audiences through posting and commenting on social media. Section 6.4 looks at why that might be.

#### **6.4 Football as a vehicle for democratic debate**

During the BBC Africa team's coverage of the 2013 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON 13) there was more reciprocity and exchange between audiences and BBC journalists compared to other social media initiatives taking place at the BBC African services at the time. As a result, both journalists' posts and fans' comments on Facebook formed the coverage of AFCON 13 on the *Love African Football* Facebook page. This Facebook group is thus a good example of participatory journalism.

Chapter 5 discussed the different types of participation taking place on *Love African Football*, concluding that 12 messages posted by the BBC journalists in charge of the group during AFCON 13 provide good examples of dialogue between football fans from all over the world and professionals. This chapter examines the details of those debates and discusses what made these particular exchanges more dialogic than the others analysed in this thesis.

Before explaining what made these exchanges between fans and journalists dialogic, it is worth pointing out that even in these selected debates, a great deal of loyalty and

support for national teams was voiced without any expression of mutual respect or listening. For example, in some conversations, the only responses made to posts from other fans were statements, some abusive, that the responder's national team was better than the original poster's. Despite this, I still argue that these 12 debates show evidence of deliberation beyond mere football banter. The following paragraphs describe examples of the types of debate that took place during AFCON 13 and provide more detail of threads that generated dialogue about corruption, global politics and African identities.

#### **6.4.1 Football chats about social inequality in Africa**

During AFCON 13, the BBC team posting on Love African Football managed to widen football topics to include debate about other subjects. The post provided as an example below discusses racial differences and national unity in South Africa and was accompanied by a link to an article written against the backdrop of criticism that the home ground of South Africa's national team, known as *Bafana Bafana*, was being run badly. The BBC journalists who posted the question began by mentioning what columnist Mpho Moshe Matheolane<sup>87</sup> had said about the poor state of South Africa's home ground, then asked about whether football is an inclusive sport for both black and white people in South Africa.

**Love African Football Post:** *What does South African sport say about*

*the country as a whole? Before the tournament began, columnist Mpho Moshe Matheolane argued that Bafana Bafana can be seen as a metaphor for the country's government: "all talk with promises of improving things but providing little or no delivery." Meanwhile football remains a majority-interest sport for blacks, while rugby and cricket fans tend to be overwhelmingly*

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<sup>87</sup> An academic and political commentator from Mahikeni with the twitter username @mphomoshe.

*white. Does sport unite South Africa more than it divides it?*

<http://mg.co.za/article/2013-01-15-bafana-bafana-south-africas->

*heartbreakers* Posted 09.41 am 7th February 2013.

There were 23 audience comments in response to this post, most of which actually responded to the question posted by the BBC Africa team. Expressions of support for national teams also occurred in this thread, but there was still some debate about the state of South Africa's football resource management and football as a unifying sport. Some commenters said that they felt that the way the BBC posed the question meant that journalists were being divisive by stating indirectly that football divides black and white people in South Africa. In response, most fans debating the issue said they thought football unites South Africa, at least when it comes to supporting their national team. The question also refers to expectations of South Africa's government, and fans expressed disappointment about the poor organisation of the games, although they perceive South Africa as being materially more developed than other African countries. By opening up the debate to discussion of equality between different groups in South Africa, the fan community worked as a deliberative space in which the public could tell their individual stories from different perspectives. The way the BBC asks a question about both the football ground and the potential lack of unity between black and white people in South Africa may seem to frame the country in a negative light, but at the same time it opens up an opportunity for participants to discuss social inequality.

#### **6.4.2 Debates about global and local politics**

As well as talking about identity and unity, many debate posts from the BBC Love African Football team asked for audiences' views on threats to local African football. One such threat is the fact that satellite TV shows the English Premier League and other European football leagues, thus threatening ticket sales for local leagues (Darby 2002, McLean and Wainwright 2009). The scarce resources of African football are also

poorly managed, and many cases of corruption are reported at the local, national, regional and African levels. Finally, poor finances and the global commercialisation of football mean that talented African players emigrate to play for foreign clubs, an exodus which further decreases interest in local African leagues.

The following debate illustrates how *Love African Football* allowed African football fans to have a say about the poor state of African football and discuss the reasons for this and possible solutions together. On 1<sup>st</sup> February, the Love African Football team posted a question asking fans in Zambia how popular local league football is compared to football from elsewhere that they can follow.

**Love African Football Post:** How popular is local league football in

Zambia compared to other football on offer? Posted 6.00 pm 1<sup>st</sup> February 2013.

There were 29 comments in response to this post, mostly from Zambian supporters. The main concern from fans was that although the local league is popular it lacks funding, although it is getting better with more sponsorship, while a new stadium has also been built as a result of Zambia winning AFCON 12. However, the point is made that despite this all the best players go abroad either to other teams in Africa or to European leagues. Others say that it is only people in cities who watch TV, leaving an underfunded Zambian national league for the common man. The Zambian fans posting comments here are given an opportunity to share their concerns about what is happening to their local football leagues with the BBC and other African football fans in Africa and around the world in an open and deliberative way. Their frustration about the poor state of African football is shared across Africa, and when the flow of power and influence in international football was addressed the discussion really got going.

### 6.4.3 Global power dissymmetry and racism against African players and teams

African football is at the mercy of global market forces, and as such talented African football players are bought by international football clubs whose lucrative licensing deals generate much more money. In addition, FIFA dominates international football, so Africa has little power over the future of African football, or least this is the perception judging by the debates on the Love African Football Facebook page. The following debates discuss globalisation and the powerlessness of local African football teams, players and fans.

**Love African Football Post:** Does Fifa show Africa enough respect? On

*Talk Of The Nations* at 2100 GMT, we will have a representative from Fifa to take your questions. Is the five places allocated to Africa at the World Cup enough? How has the World Cup legacy for South Africa panned out? Are they doing enough to tackle corruption? Anything you want to ask Fifa, let us know here, and we'll put as many of your questions to them as possible.

Posted 9.51 am 8<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

There were 110 comments for this post, more than for the other debate topics posted on Love African Football. A lot of the questions put to FIFA by the audience directly address concerns about corruption in international games, match fixing, bad referees and racism against African players and African teams. Many comments deal with racism in football or complain that international football bodies and football clubs treat players from Africa with racism. European domination of international football organisations and the system that gives Africa only five slots in the World Cup is called racist, while the World Cup is derided as the 'European Cup'.



#### 6.4.4 Monitoring and moderation of participatory debates

Although some threads on Love African Football were deliberative, many topics also went off-piste. I chose 12 topics to analyse because of the way the subjects framed a potential debate, and only one thread of the 12 spiralled out of control and ended up consisting of just expressions of support for teams and players rather than a discussion of the issue that was initially posted. The initial post for this thread is below:

**Love African Football Post:** *Manchester United scout Tom Vernon has famously described the "Pape Bouba Diop template" as being behind the European idea of what an African player is like - big, strong and powerful. But is there such a thing as an African "style" of football? Do you think the way that the matches of Afcon2013 have demonstrated a particular way of playing the game? If so, what qualities does it have - exciting and passionate, or sterile and temperamental?* Posted 1.29 pm 4<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

There were 46 comments in total in response to this BBC post, with the conversation starting at 1.29 pm GMT. Most comments were positive, talking about African football being much better than European football, while many stated that all other football nations learnt their skills from African players. Only a few messages spoke about European and South American football being technically better than African football or that they prefer the way European football is played. Many comments expressed pride in African football and African players in European leagues. However, after the 21<sup>st</sup> comment at 5.06 pm, 4.5 hours after the initial post, one supporter changed the discussion by expressing support for the Zambian team. After this the conversation deteriorated into expressions of support for national teams instead of focusing on the initial topic. Nigerian supporters made abusive comments to the Zambian fan and the

rest of the comments were just support for teams, mostly Nigeria and Ghana. Many comments were quite rude about other teams and their supporters, and particularly about the Zambian fan that first went off-topic.

This shows that a discussion which has the potential to develop into a democratic debate can also quickly shift, becoming rude and offensive, if debates are not monitored and moderated. The BBC team asking whether there is an African way of playing football in some ways contributes to the essentialisation of Africa and African players. Although some fans went along with the debate to start with, perhaps the discussion did not encourage a dialogue because it was not sufficiently relevant to fans that had come to the fan page to talk about AFCON 13. Democratic debate does not occur just because the public are able to speak on social media; it is about dialogic practices which allow other voices to be heard. However, this also requires that those talking do not engage in undemocratic debate by simply ignoring what is being discussed and trying to shout their own message. Of course, disagreeing about which is the best national football team is permitted in a deliberative space, but it is not part of democratic debate to express abuse towards others. To counter the abusive nature of some of the threads, the BBC Africa team posted a question about what it means to be a football fan. In response to this question, participants in Love African Football themselves reflected about what signifies respectful affection for a football team.

**Love African Football Post:** What's your definition of a true football fan?

Posted 9.00 pm 4<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

There were 77 comments in response to this post, with many fans talking about passion, loyalty and supporting your team no matter what, although some also talked about respecting other fans, obeying the rules and not abusing others. Comments also expressed a feeling of loyalty to a country or region, saying that there's no choice but to

simply support one's local team. Some comments stressed the importance of not being a fanatic or over-exaggerating the importance of football: 'Can you imagine a man beating his wife just because his wife's team won? I'll advice that man to upgrade his fanaticism by hugging a transformer or stopping a moving train!'<sup>88</sup>

The most important statements on fandom in the comments are about loyalty, in the form of unconditional support whether one's team wins or loses. Some fans are somewhat more fundamentalist about their loyalty, arguing that a true fan should be able to die for their team. Other fans say that a true fan appreciates good football no matter who is playing. Love African Football is thus a place to both share the joys of football fandom and show support for one's own national team. Despite their loyalty to different teams, Love African Football is still a place for football fans from all over Africa to come together.

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88 <<https://www.facebook.com/LoveAfricanFootball>> accessed 13th June 2013

Social media are often accused of creating echo chambers where participants only debate with other like-minded individuals (Bozdag et al. 2014). Similarly, research on the BBC WS's online discussion forums in Hindi and Urdu, a precursor to the use of social media for participatory journalism, shows that during the Mumbai attacks these forums were sites for shared national identities rather than a place where users could encounter and engage with 'others' (Gillespie, Herbert et al. 2010). However, although Love African Football only attracts football fans, it reaches out to fans of different African national teams and clubs, and therefore forms a transnational contact zone for public debate about football. Contrary to previous research on Facebook usage (Vickery 2009), fans are not friends in person or on Facebook, nor do they support the same team. It is thus possible to claim that BBC Love African Football on Facebook is a meeting place both for shared interests and for different opinions and loyalties.

The editor puts the success of the Love African Football fan page down to the emotive tone of the BBC's social media coverage of the Africa Cup of Nations. She explains that 'the comments posted were not just feeds of results and scores. The page is a page for fans by fans' (fieldnotes, interview with social media editor 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2013). The Love African Football brand aimed to communicate that everybody participating in the page, both producers and audiences, loves African football no matter what team they support. Previous studies of participatory journalism have shown that a great deal of audience participation takes place in response to news organisations' published content, photos, articles and videos (Domingo 2011, Hermida 2011). However, as well as just posting comments, BBC journalists establish a dialogue by replying to posts uploaded by fans in response to BBC Facebook comments. By not only posting but also replying to posts, producers aimed to make coverage and the Love African Football fan community more deliberative.

Love African Football is thus seen to be a place where different versions of African identity in the context of globalisation and development, whether regional, national or diaspora, can be discussed under the banner of football fandom. To sum up, my research showed that the *Love African Football* Facebook forum was a deliberative space for both journalists and football fans, where global politics, identity and equality could be discussed.

## 6.5 Summary

This chapter has examined the elements of participatory journalism that contribute to more democratic forms of debate by revisiting the mediated moments I studied at the BBC African services. This conclusion summarises aspects of participation at the BBC African services that can lead to more deliberative and dialogic forms of debate.

When analysing participatory journalism and democratic debate it is important to remember that journalistic values are not neutral, as mentioned in chapters 2 and 4. The BBC WS has exerted influence over audiences in Africa for the past 60 years, and I argue that its power and influence needs to be studied through the cultural and historical lens of post-colonialism and the Global North's domination of the Global South. This means that when analysing whether participatory journalism provides democratic debate it is hugely important to acknowledge that the norms of journalism are not value-free, but are based on a set of social practices constructed through evolving cultures of journalism that can also be referred to as hegemony. Like other forms of journalism, social media journalism is constructed through a set of evolving participatory practices which also include the actions of the private companies that control social media platforms, like Facebook, Twitter and Ushahidi. So, while the participatory journalism I analyse here may show signs of participation, it is important to critically analyse who benefits from participation. For this reason my thesis aims to

understand whether participatory journalism really leads to more democratic forms of debate.

The criteria used to evaluate whether these new participatory spaces exhibit characteristics of democratic debate was outlined in Chapter 2 and briefly in the introduction to this chapter. They are: inclusion and equality, including personal storytelling; reciprocity and respect; and self-reflection and mutual exploration. This conclusion summarises my findings in relation to these criteria throughout the three mediated moments I studied.

First, the inclusivity of the Nigerian election crowdmap initiative was limited as a result of quite strict professional editing of posts, which led to inequalities in debates because the audience could not have an unfiltered say. This editing took place because the journalists in charge were worried about contentious content being put on the map, so rather than trying to limit democratic debate the journalists were trying to stop undemocratic debate from spreading. The editors of the crowdmap favoured balancing the content of the map rather than allowing as many people's voices to as possible to be heard. The Nigerian election map was the first mediated moment I followed, and this chapter also clearly shows that participation is an ongoing and constantly evolving development which depends on various actions and actors. Of course, changing practices do not necessarily mean that journalism will develop towards more democratic forms of debate, but in the case of my study the journalists seemed to gain more and more confidence in engaging directly with their audience in a collaborative way over the course of my time at the BBC African services.

In Chapter 2, I argued that allowing personal storytelling by the audience can help debates to become more inclusive. The Nigerian crowdmap invited people to submit their personal stories about what was happening in their area of Nigeria on Election Day

in 2011. However, my research showed that the editors of the BBC Nigeria crowdmap did not find many of the audience's contributions sufficiently newsworthy. Engaging in dialogue with the public will not always generate interesting headlines and soundbites that gain traction amongst wider audiences, as demonstrated by the Nigerian crowdmap coverage. My study shows that professional practices make the inclusion of personal stories difficult to manage. The Nigerian election crowdmap took place in 2011, at which time the BBC African services were still cautious about including audience contributions without a professional filter. Later initiatives I followed, however, made further inclusion possible because journalists increasingly allowed the free flow of debate on third party websites. The free flow of messages on Twitter and Facebook also made it possible for journalists to listen and respond to audiences more, and thus increase the reciprocity of participatory journalism.

Despite the limitations on participation mentioned in this chapter, the Nigerian Election crowdmap still contributed to inclusion and equality in debates by democratically accepting the language used by participants in the crowdmap. Editors allowed more colloquial forms of expression, resulting in audience posts that were more representative of how participants expressed themselves in a mix of vernacular and English. This more relaxed approach to editing the Nigerian Election map allowed debates to be more equal and posts to be more authentic.

Deliberative democracy theorists have previously argued that reciprocity and respect can work as tools to build more democratic forms of debate, despite the power asymmetries between producers and audiences (Habermas 1989, Dahlberg 2005, Escobar 2009). In this chapter, I therefore argue that in order for journalism to be deliberative, participatory journalism needs to involve the exchange of messages between producers and audiences, rather than producers posting and audiences replying. Producers also need to engage with what the public says when they

contribute, and show respect for the diverse set of opinions presented through participatory journalism.

The analysis of the debate programme BBC Africa Debate and news practitioners' use of social media to engage with their listeners outlined in this chapter shows that it is possible to foster reciprocity and respect through dialogue which takes place on platforms like Twitter or Facebook. Previous research on how mainstream news channels use social media has indicated the opposite: broadcasters primarily use social channels as another channel to gain further reach. However, my analysis of tweets using the #bbcafricadebate hashtag shows that rather than the BBC using social media as a broadcast platform, there was evidence of an exchange of tweets between the BBC and the public and amongst the public themselves about the topics of the Africa Debate programmes, through retweets and mentions. There were also examples of tweeters reframing the question posted by the BBC, thus showing that participants in the Twitter conversation were able to change the original meaning of the BBC news framing.

Perhaps the most significant acknowledgement and sign of reciprocity and respect that the BBC could give its participating audience would be to read out their posts during radio broadcasts. However, there is a limit to the number of tweets a presenter can fit into a radio programme and producers are also concerned that audiences in Africa who lack access to social media would feel alienated by too much mention of social media participation. The lack of integration between radio, online and social media is a lost opportunity for participating audiences to have more influence on the BBC African services' overall news agenda, its tone and the topics covered by BBC journalists.

Previous deliberation and dialogue scholars have argued for the use of self-reflection and mutual exploration when considering the most important values at stake as



signifiers of democratic debate (Habermas 1989, Cooper 2003, Escobar 2011). I argued in Chapter 2 that it is particularly important for journalists to be self-reflective about their own power and influence over audiences, in line with Spivak's (1988) philosophy of those who speak on behalf of others. Without self-reflection, mutual exploration of participatory stories is not possible.

During AFCON 13, fans were invited to analyse football results and the performances of players and teams together with journalists on the *Love African Football* Facebook page. Despite some debates going off-topic and some posts being abusive, many threads on Love African Football served as spaces for fans to debate the issues facing African football today and explore issues of globalisation and African identity together. The cheering and good wishes for teams in response to results and commentary on Facebook indicates that following Love African Football on Facebook was almost like watching or listening to a game in a big crowd, although the crowd were not necessarily all supporting the same team.

Previous academic research has shown that networked publics usually contribute to more affective news coverage (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012), as in the case of the Love African Football fan page. Despite its affective nature, however, the participatory news environment on *Love African Football* also provides a space for public debate about broader political topics in Africa, including the lack of money in African football resulting in talented African players leaving their teams and moving to European clubs. Other topics discussed included corruption, both in Africa and at the level of FIFA, and racist sentiment against African football and its place in world tournaments. Love African Football was also a space to debate and define what African football fandom is and what football means to fans by discussing loyalty, beliefs and belonging. Very rarely were these comments abusive, although it did happen. However, unlike the Nigerian election coverage, the BBC producers' response was not to remove

posts, but rather to post a comment stating the BBC house rules for Facebook debates in order to try to avoid the debates becoming offensive.

The three mediated moments studied here show that social media and participatory journalism increasingly serve as collective communicative spaces where both producers and audiences produce content together.

The participatory journalism initiatives I have studied show increasing signs of inclusion and equality in debates as journalists become more open and inclusive on social media and allow non-professional content to be included in BBC news reports without heavy handed editing. Journalists' use of Twitter, which allows them to listen and talk to audiences using the mechanics of the platform, shows that it is possible to extend a radio debate programme to the online space, where reciprocity and respect for diverse opinions can be built. The posting, monitoring and moderation strategy of Love African Football shows that it is possible to co-create participatory news where producers and audiences use self-reflection and mutual understanding to explore African identities and global inequalities. Despite these examples of more participatory forms of journalist-driven debate on social media, many barriers to democratic debate still remain, including limitations on who can participate. The next chapter concludes this thesis by addressing the overarching research question for this research project: *Does participatory journalism lead to more democratic forms of debate?*

# Chapter 7 — Conclusion: Participatory Journalism opens up the possibility for Reciprocity and Respect in International Broadcasting

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a short summary of the research purpose, questions and main discussions of this study before going into the final concluding remarks.

The international communication landscape has changed dramatically in the past 10 years, as has the role of international broadcasting within it. As well as international radio broadcasters like the BBC WS, Voice of America, Radio France Internationale and Deutsche Welle losing influence due to new information technology, the geo political environment has shifted and Western Europe and the USA are no longer the only dominant forces transmitting news to the world. Russian and Chinese state-owned<sup>89</sup> broadcasters and Al Jazeera from Qatar are all backed by vast budgets<sup>90</sup> providing far reaching news provision around the world.

International broadcasters like the BBC WS and Radio France Internationale used to have a particularly strong foothold in Africa due to the influence they gained during the colonial era and maintained after independence (Armour 1984). However, international broadcasters are experiencing falling audience numbers as shortwave radio listening

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<sup>89</sup> CCTV's news programme for Africa launched in 2000 and broadcast in English as Africa Live)

<sup>90</sup> Lowy Institute for Public Policy's 2015 report, <<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/bbc-vs-rt-media-wars-diplomacy-and-owning-message>> Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> Jan 2017.

declines and competition from local FM radio stations in Africa (Myers 2008) and other international actors increases, while news is increasingly consumed using internet-enabled mobile devices.

In this competitive environment several states are increasing their spending on soft power (Mcauliffe 2015) whilst the BBC World Service experienced several cost cuts before the recent boosts to its funding in 2015 and in 2016,<sup>91</sup> as was discussed in Chapters 1 and 4 of this thesis.

A more competitive international communications environment also includes new actors – nations, private organisations and individuals for whom social media provide an opportunity to engage in international communication without the need for professional journalists or expensive broadcasting equipment (Gillespie and McAvoy 2016). These new communication channels have provided opportunities more democratised forms of international communication that transcend national borders. This prospect also extends to the Global South, where foreign broadcasters from the Global North previously transmitted information in a one way fashion, while now citizens from around the world are increasingly able to tell their own stories to producers and wider audiences. For example, in Chapter 5, I showed how audiences from Africa could challenge different views about perceptions of Africa on Twitter in relation to the BBC Africa Debate programme *Africa's global image: Justified or prejudiced?* – recorded in Kampala, Uganda, and broadcast on Friday 27 April 2012.

Chapter 4 discussed internet access in Africa and concluded that although social media use in Africa is still low, Facebook (the most popular social network in Africa) has grown from 17 million users in 2010 (reported by ITU<sup>92</sup> at the time), to the current figure

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91 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/aboutthebbc/entries/a082f79d-30cf-4c78-a886-0e65f460b9f5>> Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

92 December 2010 study by the UN International Telecommunications Union.

<<http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2010/social-media-boom-begins-africa>> Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2016.

of over 146 million (reported by ITU in June 2016<sup>93</sup>). However, 146 million Facebook users in Africa still only amount to 12% of the continent's total population, clearly showing the persistence of inequality in terms of access to social media. In addition, access to information technology varies vastly across different countries, with Nigeria and Kenya, for example, both having over 50% internet penetration in 2016, while less than 5% of the population of both Chad and Ethiopia are online (ITU 2016<sup>94</sup>). However, those who do use social media in various African locations still add to the plurality of voices heard on these platforms, and it is therefore important to consider them when studying international democratic debate.

To counter this news consumption caused by the internet and social media, and to reflect the dialogic turn in public engagement, the BBC World Service's core aim at the time of my study was to foster a *Global Conversation*, as discussed in Chapter 4. With this, the BBC WS tried to give the audience an opportunity to create, publish and share their own stories, thus encouraging a debate which has the potential to transgress international borders and cultural divides (BBCWS 2010). Realising this opportunity could lead to more open and inclusive forms of international debate from all over the world, including in Africa. Rather than the whole of Africa, with all its languages, my focus here was on participation by English speakers in Sub-Saharan Africa, the geographic and linguistic target of the BBC African services at the time.<sup>95</sup>

Prior to the global conversation initiative, the BBC African services were already pioneering audience participation within the BBC WS via letter and phone-in radio shows. In addition, despite comparatively low internet penetration in Sub-Saharan Africa, the services were early adopters of internet forums and social media for engaging with their audience, as with the Africa Have Your Say Forum (Sandell 2005),

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93 < <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm> > Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> December 2016.

94 < <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm#africa> > Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> December 2016.

95 The BBC WS also broadcasts in Arabic and French for Africa.

launched in 2005, and the BBC Africa Facebook page, launched in 2008 (Andersson 2010). These initiatives aimed at achieving a global conversation made the BBC African services a relevant case study for understanding participation and its role in democratic debate (see Chapter 3 for further discussion of case selection and sampling). Chapter 2 outlined a framework for transnational democratic debate based on deliberative democracy and dialogue theory, to be used to assess whether global conversations really lead to more inclusive and democratic forms of international debate, particularly between the Global North and the Global South.

Previous research into journalism and social media participation has mostly focused on the implications of audience participation for professional journalistic practices, the structure and functions of news organisations and the news content itself, without really analysing the implications for democratic debate, see for example: (Deuze 2005, Domingo, Quandt et al. 2008, Thurman 2008, Jewitt 2009, Armstrong and Gao 2010, Greer and Yan 2010, Domingo 2011, Diakopoulos, De Choudhury et al. 2012, Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012, Cozma and Chen 2013, Dimitrov 2014). In order to move beyond professional practices and address the changing audience practices of news making I have used the term 'participatory journalism', which has previously been described as collaboration between citizens and professional journalists in news making (Domingo, Quandt et al. 2008). It is an important theoretical concept for this thesis because it helps understand more collaborative forms of news that could become more democratised, rather than just new ways for journalists to publish stories on social media. However, participation is not always possible or only granted partially (Carpentier 2011) so it is important not to consider it as always leading to equal power when it comes to gathering, processing and publishing news.

The few studies that have focused on the role of social media in fostering more democratic forms of public debate have often done so in the context of one particular

country and the democratic system within it, and except for Bosch (2010), who studied social media and public discourse in South Africa, the majority of studies take place in the Global North, in the UK or the USA (Goode 2009, Antony and Thomas 2010, Kaufhold, Valenzuela et al. 2010, Gil de Zúñiga, Jung et al. 2012). Previous research into media and democracy in Africa have focused on popular media, emphasising the importance of wider and more expansive definitions of democracy, development and news, incorporating everyday expressions of citizenship such as music as journalism (Mano 2007, Wasserman 2011). This is also important for my study, in which I discuss wider definitions of news and public debate in Chapter 2 and in this conclusion, while also theorising about the meaning of journalism from the perspective of international communication rather than at just a regional or national level.

A few studies have focused on international journalism as a way of understanding the new participatory spaces created by social media platforms (for example, Zöllner 2006, Klein 2009, Andersson 2010, Abubakar 2011, Gillespie and McAvoy 2016). However, none of these studies extend their analysis or findings to theories about the implications these participatory spaces have for transnational democratic debate.

This chapter provides concluding remarks for this research, bringing together journalism studies, social media and deliberative democracy theory in order to focus on participatory journalism and democratic debate online in the context of global power and transnational networks, thus filling a research gap. The main research question for this thesis is: *What are the implications of new forms of participatory journalism for international democratic debate?*

Through participant observation at the BBC African services over the course of three years (2011-2013) I was able to draw conclusions about the role participatory journalism plays in democratic debate on social media and the limitations on such

debates. The following questions were designed to support the overarching research question, and will be dealt with in the following order in this chapter:

1. What role does participatory journalism, produced by international broadcasting, play in international democratic debate?
2. How do new forms of participatory journalism blur the boundaries between media producers and audiences, and what are the implications for democratic debate?

And finally the overarching theoretical question for this thesis was;

3. What constitutes a democratic debate, and how can we recognise its nature and quality?

This concluding chapter outlines the findings of my study and shows that participatory journalism can contribute to increased plurality and representation of diverse voices in communication that cross national and cultural divides. Furthermore, it is not just the new technology of social media that provides these opportunities; instead, practices including reciprocity, respect and mutuality in participatory journalism can lead to more democratic forms of debate.

This chapter is structured so as to address the three sub questions in order, capture links between them in summaries at the end of each subsection and then make final remarks in relation to the overall research question.

Section 7.2 discusses sub-research question 1 – *What role does international broadcasting play in international democratic debate?* This is done by drawing together the arguments in Chapter 4 which claim that although international broadcasters fulfil diplomacy objectives, they potentially have an important role to play in international



communication because their debates transcend international borders and cultural divides.

Section 7.3 discusses sub-research question 2 – *How do new forms of participatory journalism blur the boundaries between media producers and audiences, and what are the implications for democratic debate?* This section sums up the findings in Chapter 5 that participatory journalism is an on-going struggle between different practices that both enable and limit audience participation. Although journalists are often reluctant to let audiences create, publish and share stories freely as part of BBC initiatives, the roles of producers and audiences are increasingly blurred, giving more power to audiences who interact with the BBC African services. However, it is not technology alone that creates opportunities for participatory journalism; instead it is a combination of shifting journalistic values and practices (of both producers and audiences) that creates a collaborative culture.

Section 7.4 discusses the overarching theoretical question for this thesis – *What constitutes a democratic debate and how can we recognise its nature and quality?* This section looks at how the empirical findings in Chapter 6 correspond with the theory outlined Chapter 2 and argues that for democratic debate to exist, participation needs to be truly dialogic. I claim that the framework of dialogic deliberation can be summed up as needing to include: a) inclusion and equality; b) reciprocity and respect; and c) self-reflection and mutual exploration, from the point of view of both producers and participating audiences.

Finally, Section 7.5 concludes this thesis with a discussion of the overall research question – *What are the implications of new forms of participatory journalism for international democratic debate?* I argue that even if participatory journalism is a step towards allowing more diverse voices from Africa to be represented in international

communication, the implications for international democratic debate will be limited as long as participation is only accessible to a small group of crowdsourced elites. Journalists also still need to improve their listening skills and allow voices to be included in news, even if they are not expressed in the expected way or what they say is not newsworthy according to journalistic standards. However, despite its limitations, participatory journalism provides an opportunity to allow more voices from Africa to be heard in international debates and for increased diversity of voices to become a reality. As social media continues to grow, becoming the main place where many people interact with news, international democratic debate becomes even more important.

Before I reach my final conclusion, the first section of this chapter will summarise my findings in relation to international broadcasting and its role in international democratic debate.

## **7.2 The role of international broadcasting in international democratic debate**

This section discusses my findings in relation to the first sub-research question: *What role if any do international broadcasting and new participatory journalism initiatives play in international democratic debate?*

Chapter 4 argues that international broadcasters are significant players in public debate because their reach and social influence transcends national borders and due to the historic role they had in cultural diplomacy and soft power, for example during the Cold War. Through their ability to reach an audience of millions each week, international broadcasters have an opportunity to engage people across national borders which is not necessarily available to local or national broadcasters. The internet and social media now provide new ways for international broadcasters to talk to citizens around the world, while people also have the opportunity to talk back to producers, which can lead

to more open and democratic forms of production. I argue here that in order to understand democratic debate beyond national borders, it is important to consider concepts such as cosmopolitanism, democracy and media citizenship, where everyone, irrespective of national, cultural, class, gender or other belongings, has the right to receive and register information and opinions and to be represented fairly and diversely (Murdock 1994, Garnham 1999).

Even if international broadcasters have the opportunity to promote media citizenship and cosmopolitan democratic values, organisations like the BBC WS, Deutsche Welle, Radio France Internationale, CCTV, Russia Today and Voice of America are all primarily funded as a way of influencing and controlling international debate in favour of their respective nation. This can be done by educating, informing, and entertaining, but the overarching objective is always diplomacy, as international broadcasters aim to promote soft power (Nye 2008), which, as discussed in Chapter 4, is a way of gaining influence by winning over people's hearts and minds rather than through warfare or payment. Nations like Russia, China, Britain and Qatar try to own the message in international communication by using broadcasting as a strategic communication tool (Zöllner 2006). This thesis has focused particularly on the BBC WS and its move towards a more dialogic approach to soft power during the years of 2010-2013.

The operating agreement that regulates the BBC WS's relationship with the British government states that the values of democracy and freedom of speech which it aims to promote are not guided by any commercial or national interests (BBCWS 2013, BBCWS 2016). Despite the BBC WS's claimed independence from the British state, the government has historically put pressure on the broadcaster to follow its political line, most notably during the Suez crisis and the Hungarian uprising in 1956 and during the Iranian revolution in 1979 (Webb 2008). In Chapter 2, I argue that it is impossible to ever be entirely independent or impartial, especially not from a funder, and my

observations at the BBC WS show that although the government does not tell the BBC what to report, the BBC WS's management tries to second guess the government's priorities and act on them in order to secure further funding.

It is also worth remembering Britain's colonial past and the BBC WS's consequent influence in Africa. Spreading British values like democracy and freedom of speech can also be a cover for pursuing Britain's economic or political interests in Africa, as with the recently announced additional spending on BBC WS TV programmes for Africa and a digital service in Pidgin for Nigeria, which are among the UK's defence spending priorities for 2016.<sup>96</sup> I therefore argue that public diplomacy in the context of Africa needs to take into account that BBC WS discourses of democracy and development may also promote globalisation on terms which favour the economic and political goals of the Global North without taking in to consideration the history of colonialism, as well as neoliberal economic development which sometimes favours foreign investors ahead of local populations, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 also showed how the BBC WS's relationship with the British government and its audiences in Africa is constantly changing and evolving in relation to the changing political, social, economic and cultural context in which it broadcasts. Although social media is new, the British government and the colonial office have been using broadcasting to both influence and empower Africa since as early as 1936 (Armour 1984). Participatory journalism via social media is thus the latest development in the BBC African services' management of its audience in today's media and political landscape.

It is not so easy for the British government to use the BBC WS to influence international debate. Power is difficult to control or direct within complex networks of international

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<sup>96</sup> November 2016 BBC Press release about increased funding.  
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2016/world-service-expansion>> Accessed Jan 7<sup>th</sup> 2017.

communications including networked individuals, and media influence does not flow in straightforward ways online. One example of a media contra flow which is important to consider is the now socially and technologically connected and diverse African diaspora. The BBC WS has previously been studied as a diasporic contact zone (Gillespie, Mackay et al. 2011), and this theoretical framework is important for understanding the complex set of relationships, power and contraflows ingrained in participatory journalism at the BBC WS.

In addition, new internet-enabled communication technologies with the ability to transgress time and space can turn small local communities into transnational communities, as with debates about the English Premier League on Facebook or audiences from all over Africa and around the world coming together to discuss the BBC Africa Debate programme on Twitter (see chapters 5 and 6). Participatory journalism makes it necessary to consider the reversed flow of media content enabled by new media and citizen journalism for example, where because audiences can also participate and co-produce information themselves, they can no longer just be broadcast to as geographic audience targets.

Although I demonstrate that journalists are reluctant to let go of their role as gatekeepers, my study also shows that the practices of journalists and audiences are changing, meaning that audiences can become more active in the production of content. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, participation is difficult to achieve. Meaningful participation might not be granted, journalists may not be able to listen and incorporate expressions they are not used to and audiences often do not have access or enough knowledge to participate in debates as demonstrated in Chapter 5.

In addition, Chapter 4 shows that making debates available online gives precedence to crowd-sourced elites with access to digital tools and the knowledge to use them. For

example, many bloggers and NGOs have more followers and influence on Twitter than the BBC African services do. The BBC Africa Debate social media editor argues that these social media influences, or crowdsourced elites, are the real competitors to Africa Debate, not other international broadcasters like Voice of America or Deutsche Welle (fieldnotes, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2012, interview with social media editor). When discussing power and equality in the context of the Africa Debates on Twitter, perhaps it is not the BBC that is the dominant voice, but rather those who have more influence on social media because they are relevant and relatable to diverse African audiences. However, targeting affluent people via social media is shifting the focus of the BBC African services from a lifeline radio service in rural areas of Africa to a transnational online sphere for those interested in international news and politics.

Although participatory journalism allows more participation, there is inequality and elite bias in whose voice is heard, which prevents participatory initiatives from being fully open and democratic. Encouraging only elites to have a voice is problematic from a deliberative democracy perspective. However, media citizenship is not just about having access to technology. In order for participatory journalism to be inclusive it needs to be able to incorporate diverse opinions and permit fair representation irrespective of national, cultural, class, gender or other belongings. The promise that social media will provide more space for online democratic debate is one of the factors that fuelled the dialogic turn in public engagement and therefore also the global conversation. However, because of the remaining inequalities in the distribution and representation of African voices in international media, I also argue that cultural imperialism is still relevant in the African context and that media and democracy needs to be critically assessed through the lens of the political economy of access to ICTs (Louw 2011b, Wasserman 2010). However, irrespective of these difficulties in fostering an inclusive international debate, I argue that open and accessible democratic debate about building an international democratic culture is important.

Social media has not removed the need for accurate news reporting around the world, a need that the BBC WS has aimed to meet for the past 80 years. As well as providing an opportunity for a more democratic global debate, social media can also be used to facilitate the kind of undemocratic debate involving abusive comments, trolling, falsified information and domination of arguments that has characterised recent political debates (as discussed in chapters 2 and 6). I believe that if professional journalists play the role of facilitators of democratic debate, they can play a significant role in minimising the amount of undemocratic online debate around the world.

In order to assess whether more participatory forms of journalism lead to more democratic forms of international debate it is necessary to use a theoretical framework. Chapters 2 and 6 argued that international broadcasters need to become more dialogic in order to open up and allow audiences from Africa to tell their stories, embracing inclusion, reciprocity, mutuality and self-reflection, as discussed in Chapter 6 and later in this chapter.

In order to unpick the role of participatory journalism in fostering democratic debate, it was first necessary to understand the interplay between producers and audiences at the BBC African services to see if production practices really were changing. The next section outlines my findings in relation to the practices of participatory journalism I studied.

### **7.3 Blurring boundaries between producers and audiences**

The literature outlined in Chapter 2 suggests that participation between producers and users creates new forms of news and new blurred roles, where producers and consumers merge to become 'produsers' (Bruns 2006). However, previous research has also shown that despite innovations in participatory technology journalists are still powerful gatekeepers in news content production, particularly at the BBC (Singer

2006, Harrison 2009). Instead, tokenistic forms of participation like interaction with already produced content is more common, or if participation is allowed then professional filtering often limits it (Carpentier 2011).

From participant observation in the BBC Africa newsroom and analysis of data from BBC Africa-hosted social media initiatives, I have demonstrated that participatory journalism is an on-going struggle between different practices that both enable and limit collaboration between journalists and participating audiences. This section outlines my findings and conclusions in relation to the second sub-question: *How do new forms of participatory journalism blur the boundaries between media producers and audiences, and what are the implications for democratic debate?*

### **7.3.1 Journalistic values and practices which act as barriers to participation**

During my research at the BBC African services I came across a set of values and practices which act as barriers to participation. I also found that these practices change slowly as audience participation increases.

The core values of the journalists I interviewed were accuracy, impartiality, independence and quality, which Chapter 2 argued are grounded in a culture of objectivity. From the enlightenment onwards, modern journalism has been founded on ontological realism, according to which journalists' reports are seen as representing a true version of reality, also referred to as objectivity (Soffer 2009). However, journalists today, influenced by postmodernism, rarely claim to be objective in an ontological sense. Instead, impartiality and balance imply reporting both sides of an argument and not taking sides. However, despite no longer claiming to be objective, the journalists I spoke to still favour objective journalistic values such as 'truthfulness, relevance,



balance, impartiality, non-distortion, neutrality, testability, informative-ness, fairness, depersonalisation, scepticism and factuality' (Ognianova and Endersby 1996:10).

I argue that objectivity is not compatible with participation and democratic debate because it does not allow inclusion and representation of diverse opinions beyond binary arguments. Instead, previous research has shown that personal storytelling, songs, jokes and rhetoric are important aspects of representation in African public spheres (Spitulnik 2003, Mano 2007). As long as there is respectful listening and a chance for all participants to express their views, there is an opportunity for participation to take place, as discussed in Chapter 6. The important conclusion I draw is that the BBC African services have an opportunity to include more personal stories and voices from audiences in Africa, and that if they do so they can contribute to more participatory forms of news and more democratic forms of international debate. However, journalists would have to adapt some of their professional values which are less prone to permitting participation, as I will discuss next.

As outlined in Chapter 5, a main concern during the participatory initiatives I studied was to safeguard the public's trust in the journalistic profession and the BBC. In this context, trust was about the audience's belief in the truth of what the BBC reports, based on following guidelines which make sure their reports are unbiased and impartial. My research showed that all of these values were difficult for the journalists at the BBC African services to maintain in a participatory news environment, partly because of the number of responses and partly because the audience was joining in in order to have a debate rather than to follow the BBC's editorial guidelines. Instead, the journalistic gatekeeping structures prevented the journalists and the audience from engaging in a mutual dialogue. However, these practices were shifting during my fieldwork, and while I witnessed journalistic gatekeeping strategies, I also observed journalistic practices become more collaborative. For example, as was demonstrated in Chapter 5, the BBC

Love African Football Facebook page during AFCON 13 showed how journalistic practices were negotiated and shifted to more dialogic forms of debate during my fieldwork period.

Even if this was not articulated, the shift in journalistic values amongst some journalists I interviewed was linked to ideas of participation and deliberative democracy theory. They believed that the citizens of Africa should have a voice, that their opinion should be heard and that the BBC African services should become more of a facilitator of their voices, taking a more dialogic approach (as discussed in Chapter 5). However, these values change only slowly and the culture of objectivity was still strong at the BBC African services during my study. In order to safeguard the values of impartial and balanced news reporting, a set of gatekeeping practices are in place. Gatekeeping refers to journalists guarding the gates of information through the sole right to publish (Singer 2004). The following section discusses the gatekeeping practices I observed and how they were changing in response to new forms of audience participation.

A strong practice used to ensure accuracy in news reporting is verification. Of the mediated moments I studied for this thesis, the verification element of audience contributions was particularly strong in the April 2011 Nigerian Election Crowd Map. BBC guidelines advise against unverified content being published on BBC managed platforms and say that if journalists include citizen journalism in their reporting, the content should be clearly marked as such (BBC 2015). The journalists updating the Ushahidi crowd map during the 2011 Nigerian presidential election did not have time to verify all the citizen reports coming in from the public during the day because this typically involved trying to speak to the contributor on the phone or checking a photo for accuracy by comparing it to previous footage from the same location. In order to get around the verification dilemma, the editor in charge on the day clearly labelled citizen reports as 'unverified' on the Ushahidi map, meaning that citizen reports could be

published without being verified according to BBC standards. Thus, my research shows that the social media editor in charge during the Nigerian election crowdmap initiative on Ushahidi in 2011 negotiated and adapted the guidelines to achieve audience participation from voters.

The journalists' gatekeeping practices during the Nigerian election extended to the selection and editing of audience posts: so called pre-moderation. Editing of contributions was mainly carried out in order to avoid contentious content that could prompt violence in Nigeria. In Chapter 5, I argued that this filtering process most likely stopped undemocratic debate, but it also slowed down publication and therefore limited the number of participants contributing to the map. In similar non-BBC initiatives, for example *Reclaim Naija* in 2011 – a collaboration on Ushahidi between several grassroots organisations in Nigeria discussed in Chapter 5 in which participants contributed in large numbers – the crowd provided verification and quality control (Bailard and Livingston 2014). Verification in numbers takes place by the same information being posted over and over again, which can be used to cross-reference events (Hermida 2012). *Reclaim Naija* received several thousand contributions, in contrast to the BBC's initiative, which achieved a mere 67 posts, because it allowed the free flow of information from participants and relied on scrutiny from crowds. I argue here that journalistic pre-moderation practices slow down participation and therefore hinder democratic debate and that crowd verification is more compatible with audience participation initiatives. However, stricter moderation prevents abusive comments and potential hate speech on BBC and third party platforms, something the BBC wants to control in order to safeguard trust in the BBC brand as an impartial news provider.

Another reason for editing posts, apart from discouraging undemocratic debate, was to maintain BBC quality standards, as mentioned in Chapter 5. The BBC editors copyedited the posts coming in from the Nigerian public in order to maintain linguistic

standards. At the time this was common practice at the BBC WS and in other parts of the BBC (BBC 2015). However, according to my analysis, not all posts on the Ushahidi crowd map were edited in line with BBC quality standards. As I observed posts and talked to the map editors on the day, it became clear that spelling and language mistakes were kept in some posts in order to keep the authenticity of citizens' language and expressions. This practice signified a shift in quality control with regards to user-generated content and is an example of journalists adapting their gatekeeping function to better suit a participatory environment. Traditionally, journalists would have applied the gatekeeping principle of editing these posts, but here the editor decided that the authenticity of participants' voices was more important than a pre-fixed notion of journalistic standards. In my view this is a sign of the democratisation of language in news reporting and a step towards allowing more voices to be heard. Further evidence of the BBC WS democratising language is the recent decision to start providing a digital service in Pidgin<sup>97</sup> for Nigeria for the first time.

I found that there was a big difference between gatekeeping on the BBC's own platforms, particularly radio versus third party platforms like Twitter and Facebook. There was much more gatekeeping on the BBC African services' own platforms, as my observations of the BBC Africa Debate programme shows.

A significant part of the BBC WS's strategy for producing a new debate programme for Africa – BBC Africa Debate – was to integrate social media into the radio programme proposition. This would allow participants to discuss the topics before and after the radio programme and therefore extend the debate to more people and for a longer period of time (i.e. beyond the 50-minute radio broadcast). The programme, launched in January 2012 during my time with the service, illustrates how, despite the debate format's audience-led approach, it is not participatory in the sense of giving control of

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<sup>97</sup> Despite English being the official language of Nigeria, Pidgin is spoken by 74% of the population although it has no official status. African Media Development Initiative + Nigeria Report from 2006 published by the BBC WST.

storytelling to the audience, at least not on BBC platforms. The format consists of 100 guests being invited to the studio, a large audience compared to traditional radio debate programmes. During the show, the studio audience hold a panel of 6 to 10 experts to account. Despite this deliberative format, I observed several barriers to audience participation whilst following the production of the programmes.

First, a strong barrier to participation was that the BBC Africa Debate team selected the topics for each programme rather than allowing the audience to do so. At the time of my fieldwork there were no direct plans to allow the participating audience on social media to suggest topics for future debates. Instead, the production team were concerned that the audience would not pick relevant or interesting enough topics for a pan-African audience because the topics needed to be current but not too topical since the programme is only broadcast once a month. Perhaps control by journalists ensures more interesting programmes, but it also potentially limits representation of the diversity of issues and topics that are of relevance for different African audiences.

Second, the BBC *Africa Debate* producers favoured expert contributors rather than storytelling and personal narratives from the public. While social media and blogs form a new participatory online environment featuring an influx of opinion in public forums, far from embracing the public's contributions, BBC management and producers wanted more facts and less opinion, or 'less heat and more light in the African public sphere' (interview with senior producer 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012). As well as the panellists, the 100 in-studio audience members who took part in the debate were also selected based on their expertise and their ability to articulate their views. The audience therefore predominantly included elite audiences such as business professionals, academics, NGO representatives and other influencers. This approach did not provide an opportunity for a more democratic African debate on radio. For example, according to the show's producers, the focus on experts made it difficult to recruit women to the

expert panel because fewer women than men hold 'traditional' expert positions. I therefore argue that debates could be more inclusive if producers put less emphasis on formal expertise and more focus on experiential knowledge when selecting in-studio audiences.

Third, another technique used by BBC Africa producers to know and pre-package the message broadcast by BBC Africa Debate was formatting. Formatting involves journalists talking to the audience before a programme recording in order to control what they are going to say (Ytreberg 2004) and was used in this instance to safeguard the BBC's editorial values of balance and impartiality. Balance in this case meant, for example, that for the debate 'Africa's image: fair or prejudice', mentioned in Chapter 5, 50% of participants believed that the image of Africa was fair, while 50% thought it was prejudiced. The producers of BBC *Africa Debate* made sure that there was balance in the radio debate by finding out beforehand what each audience member was going to say so they could call on them at the right time. The formatting practice was not carried out in order to be manipulative or deceitful; rather it was about making sure that the programme was interesting and balanced. This also shows that despite trying to make *Africa Debate* an audience led format, it is still the producers and the presenter who decided what the debate should be about. Taking a more deliberative approach, it should be possible for presenters to demonstrate diverse opinions as long as the programme reflects the audience's views. If more people in the audience think the image of Africa is prejudiced, it should be acceptable to reflect that imbalance in the programme, just as it should be fine to just present experts' views about climate change without interviewing climate change sceptics. The important thing is to move away from binary arguments and reflect a more diverse view of topics.

Finally, despite arguments that media platforms are increasingly converging to one platform (Jenkins 2006, Dwyer 2010), my research shows that there was little crossover

between activity on the BBC Africa Debate social media platforms and its monthly radio programme. For example, the Twitter comments posted online were not integrated into the radio programme. The only crossover was that some of the in-studio audience tweeted from the live debate, meaning that the studio conversations also extended to social media. However, the social media debates had little impact on the in-studio debate. Africa Debate is thus still a producer-led and presenter-led programme with little blurring of the boundaries between producers and audiences and between social media and radio.

There was much more evidence of dynamic and open participation on Twitter, where participants used the hashtag #bbcafricadebate. Far from the strict control of the radio debate, the producers did not moderate debates on Twitter during my observation, apart from posting the BBC house rules. BBC Africa Debate was therefore more participatory than prior radio '*Have Your Say*' programmes, involving audience members phoning in, because more people can now get involved in content production without professional filtering. As a result, contributors using the hashtag become producers of their own story, which they can broadcast to their own social media networks. Although the themes discussed using #bbcafricadebate were inspired by BBC producers, tweeters could rewrite the question and frame the answer in a different way without the BBC being able to control quality, balance or impartiality, as demonstrated in Chapter 6. I therefore argue that these networked spaces, outside BBC Africa's mainstream offer, are where different democratic debates take place. The merging of BBC Africa journalism and audience collaboration was studied further during the 2013 Africa Cup of Nations.

During the course of my fieldwork, audience participation without strict verification or pre-moderation became a more accepted practice at the BBC African services.

Facebook and Twitter were increasingly seen as third party platforms where the BBC

no longer had to safeguard debates through journalistic gatekeeping. Making a clear distinction between the BBC's own websites and third party sites allowed more unsupervised audience participation to take place on social media compared to when the BBC was running its own interactive forums on BBC websites (Gillespie, Herbert et al. 2010). The relaxation of editorial guidelines on social media has meant more opportunity for audiences to produce content freely in collaboration with the BBC, as was shown in the third mediated moment I studied in 2013.

### **7.3.2 The fan page becomes the news content – affective football commentary and political discourse**

During the third mediated moment studied for this thesis, the Love African Football initiative during the Africa Cup of Nations from January to February 2013, fans were invited to analyse football results and the performances of players and teams on Facebook. However, fans' analyses mostly consisted of passionate expressions of support for their own national team, confirming previous academic research showing that networked publics usually contribute to more affective news coverage (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012). However, further analysis of affective support for national football teams on the Love African Football Facebook page showed that amongst the banter there was also space for public debate about broader political topics in Africa, including: globalisation and the loss of African football talent to European clubs; corruption at FIFA, the governing body of world football; corruption and mismanagement at local football stadiums and training grounds in Africa; and the negative impact of the global media on ticket sales for local games in Africa.

Rather than just posting news updates, in order to maintain a dialogue, the BBC producers who posted stories on *Love African Football* replied to fans who commented on their stories. This is quite unlike a lot of journalism on social media where journalists treat the new platform as just another broadcast medium (Andersson 2010). Studying



this BBC Facebook group not only showed how social media participation is affective but also that it is deliberative. The only slight caveat to this finding is that fans did not reply directly to each other's Facebook posts, even if they were replying to the same BBC post. Thus the dialogue was with the BBC rather than with each other, quite unlike the BBC Africa debates on Twitter, where a lot of dialogue took place between tweeters. In March 2013, Facebook introduced replies to comments, allowing the audience to reply to each other's comments, a development which may have affected interaction between fans and which shows that technological features also matter in enabling producers and audiences to debate with each other.

The hybrid news co-created by BBC journalists and audience members on social media breaks up the boundaries between published and spoken words, between professional and amateur content and between one to one and many to many forms of communication. These shifts have consequences for power relations between producers situated in a news organisation in the Global North and audiences in the Global South because audience participation allows African audiences to talk back, at least on social media. It is important to remember that journalists still have gatekeeping power on BBC platforms, but on social media audiences co-construct news stories, rewrite questions posed by the BBC and provide their own analysis and news commentary.

The producers of Love Africa Football did not edit comments. Instead, if fans used abusive language on the page they reposted the BBC community house rules to remind fans to show each other respect, as covered in more detail in Chapter 5. If this did not work, producers excluded individuals from the conversations. The BBC's community rules are stricter than Facebook's own guidelines, and Facebook has been criticised by individuals and advocacy groups for not doing enough to stop racist, sexist and other

forms of hate speech on its platform.<sup>98</sup> My research shows that despite new communicative spaces like Facebook and Twitter, journalists at the BBC African services tend to try to apply their professional values in an attempt to normalise social media and make it a platform where they are still able to follow editorial guidelines, as outlined in Chapter 5. Avoiding hate speech facilitates democratic debate by preventing undemocratic speech from spreading. As well as hate speech, examples of undemocratic debate are: exchanging of monologues, pre-packaged arguments, dominant voices, posturing, specialised jargon, avoidance of difficult issues, tokenism, polarisation and confrontational exchange (Escobar 2011). While editorial practices can act as a barrier against abusive language online, this study shows that the gatekeeping functions of professional journalists can also stop democratic debate taking place because they sometimes prevent diverse voices being included.

These analyses show that it is not technology or journalistic practices alone that enable participation. Rather, it is a combination of journalistic values, the technological functions of social platforms and audience practices that create a participatory and collaborative culture. My research shows that social media cannot make journalism democratic on its own. Instead, it is necessary for journalistic values and practices to change and adapt to new social media platforms in order for participatory journalism to take place. New participatory environments call for the adaptation of editorial guidelines. Participatory practices were adapting to a social media environment during my time with the BBC African services, including linguistic open-mindedness and journalists holding a dialogue with participating audiences rather than just broadcasting news on social media. There is no quick solution to making journalism more participatory; new practices are already emerging and will carry on being negotiated over time. Whether

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<sup>98</sup> Article about Facebook and its community standards.  
<<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/mar/16/facebook-policy-nudity-hate-speech-standards>> Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

the result of changing journalistic practices is more democratic forms of news depends on those practices.

In order to answer the second part of the second supporting question – *what are the implications* [of new forms of participatory journalism] *for democratic debate?* – It is necessary to answer the third and final supporting question – *What constitutes a democratic debate, and how can we recognise its nature and quality?* Section 7.4 addresses this question.

## **7.4 The nature and quality of democratic debate**

Having examined the changes to journalistic practices, in this section I discuss my conclusions about the nature and quality of democratic debate in relation to participatory journalism at the BBC African services. In line with Habermas, Chapter 2 concluded that deliberation is crucial for democratic life and defined dialogic debate as being characterised by reciprocity, reflexivity, listening, understanding, sincerity, discursive inclusion, equality and autonomy from administrative and economic power. My theoretical framework takes into consideration criticism of Habermas's theory of communicative rationality and forms a pluralist view of the public sphere, using ideas from Fraser (1992), Downey and Fenton (2003), Cottle (2006), Young and Press (2000) and Mouffe (1992). These authors argue that Habermas's communicative rationality does not allow for aesthetic affective modes of communication and that aiming for consensus in debate excludes those who think differently from participating in the public sphere. I took these criticisms on board, arguing that democratic deliberation needs to emphasise inclusion and equality as well as giving importance to listening to and respecting each other's experiences and perspectives in public debate (Escobar 2011).

Previous research points towards a deficiency in open public debate in Africa due to national media censorship and domination by the Global North (Hydén, Leslie et al. 2003, Ogundimu 2003). I argue that social media-enabled communicative spaces are important spheres for public debate in this environment, as important aspects of African publicness like oral traditions, storytelling, jokes, music and poetry can be self-published by citizens on social media. Social media likes and shares can also constitute democratic activity, and therefore definitions of both journalism and democratic debate need to be extended to social media activity as well as including rhetoric, storytelling, music and jokes.

I have conceptualised new definitions of journalism and deliberation that include dialogue, mutuality, storytelling and personal narratives that can lead to a more open, participatory and therefore democratic debate. The media should help make a plurality of interests known and heard, at least in principle, and especially if the aim is to foster a global conversation. In the upcoming section I evaluate participatory journalism observed at the BBC African services in relation to the theoretical framework of democratic debate outlined in Chapter 2 and the supporting research findings in chapters 5 and 6 to come up with a model for more democratic forms of participation in news making. I believe this model of dialogic deliberation should be taught as part of journalism courses and as part of educational curriculums all over the world because it is not just in the hands of professional journalists to change the deliberative order, it is the people who participate in hybrid forms of news on social media's responsibility as well. The proposed model starts with the democratic criteria of inclusion and equality.

#### **7.4.1 Inclusion and equality**

According to Habermas, the public sphere is characterised by deliberation being open to all and the outcome of debates being based on the quality of the arguments rather than on an unequal distribution of power (Habermas 1989), a form of participation that

is not compatible with traditional journalistic values where the journalist is the gatekeeper and therefore holds the power. Participation is particularly difficult to manage when there is great inequality in terms of material and economic resources between the Global North and the Global South (Spivak 1988), and this is especially so if journalists are in the Global North and the participating audience are in Africa. Just one example of the uneven distribution of material resources in Africa is uneven access to internet connections, as outlined in Chapter 4. However, inclusive participatory journalism is not just about the audience being able to access social media; it is also about BBC producers being able to listen to what those who express themselves differently from the producers say and mean. Chapter 2 referenced Spivak (1988), who argues that hegemonic discourses in the West are deaf even when subaltern subjects do speak, if they do not express themselves the expected way. The BBC's objectives state that they are trying to improve the lives of less privileged groups in Africa, whom they refer to as the 'information poor'. However, there is still a risk that racist and imperialistic outlooks are reinforced by the BBC talking at rather than with people in Africa.

The BBC's editorial preference for facts over opinion is an indication that fixed notions of news values still represent a barrier to participation in today's BBC African services. In the interviews detailed in chapters 5 and 6, journalists say that they consider facts to be the truth, pieces of information that can be verified. On the other hand, opinion, such as an audience member's point of view, is personal, something that cannot be fact checked. In general, the distinction seems to be that journalists provide facts while the public supplies opinion. In a 2011 booklet, then BBC WS director Peter Horrocks argues that the organisation should provide more light (facts) and less heat (opinion) in the global debate (Horrocks 2011).

Chapter 2 argues against this strict distinction between facts and opinion, questioning the journalistic concept of objectivity and the idea that journalists can provide facts and report the truth. In order to limit inequality in debates it is important to permit different and diverse opinions, knowledge and voices to be represented in public debates (Mouffe 1999, Young and Press 2000).

The BBC's editorial guidelines state that the BBC should not express any opinion in political reporting and should not put itself at risk of being used as a platform for campaigning. This policy protects the BBC's notion of impartiality, but makes it difficult for citizens to participate and contribute to news coverage, particularly in an election. Not wanting to broadcast too much opinion was also raised as one of the barriers to the participation of non-experts in Africa Debate. Although the BBC Africa debates that took place on Twitter included personal narratives and were more representative of diverse opinion and knowledge, crowdsourced elites talk on behalf of less privileged groups, and as a result inequalities in participation and media representation prevail.

It is possible for journalists to take steps towards more inclusive debates. One example encountered during this study was when citizens' posts on the Ushahidi crowdmap during the 2011 Nigerian election were allowed to include language variations, with contributions left unedited in order to keep the language as authentic as possible. However, it would have been even more inclusive to just allow the reports to go straight up on the map without editors professionally filtering all the comments before publication. It is important to remember Freire's (2000) ideas about dialogue being communal learning, that it is imperative to observe hidden values, intentions and control and that unnoticed cultural differences can clash without us realising. Chapter 2 discussed the importance to democratic debate of allowing people to tell their own stories and personal narratives (Young and Press 2000, Ryfe 2006), and the crowdmap could have been a perfect opportunity to permit citizens to express their accounts of

events in their own way. Showing respect for people's different ways of expressing themselves is an important step towards equality in debates, as is reciprocity. Both concepts are discussed in the following section.

#### **7.4.2 Reciprocity and respect**

Deliberative democracy theorists have previously argued that reciprocity and respect are tools for building democratic debate (Habermas 1989, Dahlberg 2005, Escobar 2009). In this study, I look at how reciprocity works in practice by demonstrating the relationship between professional producers and participating audiences at the BBC African services. My findings show that in order for journalism to be deliberative, participatory journalism must involve an exchange of messages between producers and audiences, rather than only producers posting and the audience just replying.

Reciprocity and respect, and therefore participation, takes place when there is dialogue and continuous mutual listening. The following two examples show how reciprocity and respect contributed to dialogue on BBC-administered social media platforms during my study.

The Love African Football coverage on Facebook showed evidence of an environment where people with different national football loyalties could discuss football, African politics and social issues together, despite their differences. Most posts showed respect for others' views, although there were some abusive comments about other local and national teams. The BBC team showed reciprocity by answering fans' comments, and most dialogue that took place was between fans and BBC producers. Posts in which BBC producers posed a question received the greatest response from audiences, such as: *What's your favourite 2013 Africa Cup of Nations moment?* or simply: *are you team Nigeria?* These simple football-related questions allowed fans to engage with the content and hold a dialogue with producers and with each other during games. Questions addressing more political, economic and social issues were also

popular, receiving an average of 544 comments from fans according to my analysis of the BBC's Facebook Analytics.

All threads on Love African Football Facebook were begun by BBC professional producers, but fans then contributed to the dialogue by posting responses in the comments field. Most debates started off as answers to the topic posted in the original post but then diverged to football banter and expressions of support for fans' own national teams. However, in the meantime a rich transnational debate took place which showed reciprocity and respect between fans and producers.

The Twitter debates in relation to BBC Africa Debate were deliberative in a slightly different manner to those on the Love African Football Facebook page. On Twitter there was less sign evidence of reciprocity between producers and audiences and more evidence of reciprocity and respect between tweeters. I have shown that BBC Africa Debate on Twitter showed more sign of reciprocity than previous studies have shown is otherwise the norm during Twitter conversations (Kwak, Lee et al. 2010). For example, my quantitative analysis shows that 70% of all tweets using the hashtag #bbcafricadebate were posted by the public, not by BBC staff, indicating that the hashtag was not just used by producers to promote the programme. Another measure of reciprocity I took note of was retweeting. Retweets indicate interest but also show trust in the original message and its originator, creating a conversational environment in which people can decide whether they want to get involved in the debate or not (Boyd, Golder et al. 2010, Cha, Haddadi et al. 2010). The high proportion of retweets of #bbcafricadebate shows that this was an environment in which conversation and on-going debate took place. For BBC Africa Debate, 79% of all retweets were by members of the public rather than by BBC producers, meaning that there was an active conversational environment between tweeters themselves. Some tweeters also reframed the questions originally posed by the BBC team, for example, changing the



question about Africa's image from asking if Africa has an image problem to wondering if the world perhaps has an ignorance problem. The act of taking ownership of the question showed that there was an openness to different viewpoints being put across, indicating the mutual exploration of topics (Buber 2004, Escobar 2011). According to my dialogic deliberation framework, it is important that both parties use self-reflection and allow for mutual exploration in democratic debate.

### **7.4.3 Self-reflection and mutual exploration**

As discussed in Chapter 2, previous deliberation and dialogue scholars have argued that self-reflection and mutual exploration should be used when considering the most important values necessary to achieve democratic debate (Habermas 1989, Cooper 2003, Escobar 2011). Self-reflection in this context means that producers and audiences need to think about and debate their own opinions and practices in relation to others. I agree that it is extra important for journalists to be reflective about their own power and influence over audiences, in line with Spivak's (1988) philosophy of those who speak on behalf of others. Several authors have studied journalists' self-reflection in relation to their imagined audience and the news subjects they write about (Hannerz 2002, Domingo 2008, Kunelius and Ruusunoksa 2008, Carpentier 2009), as discussed in chapters 2 and 3. Participatory journalism means that journalists need to reflect on their role in a debate where they explore and shape the story together with audiences. Without self-reflection, mutual exploration of stories by producers and audiences is not possible.

During the participatory initiatives I studied there were examples of producers using self-reflection to make debates more inclusive and participatory. For example, including more women in the BBC Africa Debate programmes and inviting female bloggers and social media influencers to comment using the #bbcafricadebate hashtag made sure of a gender balance in debates, and my quantitative analysis shows that 50% of all

participants using the hashtag on Twitter were female. Further comparative analysis using the BBC's in-house Facebook Analytics shows that there is usually a male bias in on other BBC debate programmes. Another example of an initiative to ensure more equality in debates was the inclusion of posts on the Ushahidi crowdmap without making language edits. During my study the producers were experimenting, self-reflecting and learning how to do participatory journalism, and although increasing reach was at the top of their agenda, they implemented many strategies to increase equality in debates.

This new collaborative role was not easy for all journalists. Managing journalistic standards, BBC editorial guidelines and the values they had been trained with in an ever-changing social media landscape proved challenging for many. According to journalists, the importance of audience participation for the future of journalism was divisive, and I encountered both enthusiasts for participation and sceptics. The sceptics were more reflective about their role in participation, especially when it came to the potential to alienate older and non-connected audiences listening to the service on the radio.

Even those journalists who were enthusiastic about social media had their doubts about its benefit for production values. During all three mediated moments I followed there was a feeling among journalists that audience contributions were not particularly interesting or newsworthy. Chapter 5 argued that coverage of the 2011 Nigerian election on the Ushahidi map was a good opportunity to allow mutual exploration of the voting process by BBC journalists asking open questions about voters' own experiences. However, asking amateurs exploratory questions meant that the content that came back was perhaps destined to be benign by its very nature. I have found that for the other mediated moments I studied, participation was increased by asking questions in a more confrontational style, provoking a for-and-against response which

producers felt would make for more interesting debates. For example, one BBC Africa Debate programme was called *China in Africa: Partner or Plunderer?* Although this approach may have encouraged more heated discussions about the topic, I argue that it does not allow mutual exploration of China's role in Africa. In addition, producers did not want to allow the audience to decide the subjects for the Africa Debate programmes because they felt that this would not result in interesting topics. Here is an important clash between the aims to inform and entertain, which poses additional challenges to allowing the public to tell their own stories as part of news production.

During the 2013 Africa Cup of Nations, a threat to the newsworthiness of the Love African Football initiative was when fans did not provide full answers to BBC producers' questions, but just posted two-word answers like '*Go Burkina Faso!*'. However, by wording questions so that they explored political and social issues related to football, many threads on the forum ended up exploring topics such as European and African football and whether African football and players are discriminated against internationally. The way producers asked these questions showed reflexivity and a wish to explore topics together with the audience. Three examples of questions from the Love African Football forum are given here:

- What is an African player like?
- Should a team with a European or African coach win?
- Does FIFA show Africa enough respect?

I argued in Chapter 6 that these questions and the responses from audiences show that Love African Football works as a forum where BBC African services producers can explore African identities, globalisation, racial discrimination and corruption in local politics with football fans. Letting the audience mutually explore and co-construct topics means that newsworthiness needs to be renegotiated, as what journalists think is newsworthy might not be the same as what participating audiences value.

In order to answer the research question about the role participatory journalism plays in democratic debate it was necessary to evaluate the debates I observed against criteria defining the nature and quality of such debates. I therefore argue for a model where participatory journalism is more dialogic, and therefore inclusive and open to different ways of speaking, producers and audiences should focus more on inclusion and equality, reciprocity and respect and self-reflection and mutual exploration. The many recent examples of undemocratic debate seen online today in the form of filter bubbles, information wars, cyber bullying and terrorist propaganda makes it even more important to understand what kind of participation can lead to democratic debate. Professional journalists and audiences both play a great part in ensuring that democratic practices prevail in international debate. I therefore propose that journalist practitioners both professional and amateur are encouraged to understand dialogic deliberation as part of their training.

The following section sums up my findings and gives recommendations for further research and participatory practice.

## **7.5 Final discussion and considerations for the future of international participatory spaces**

Here I will make a few final remarks in relation to the overall research question – *What are the implications of new forms of participatory journalism for transitional democratic debate?*

Through the unique access I negotiated at the BBC African services, meaning I could both spend time in the newsroom and analyse social media analytics, I was able to gain a combined picture of participatory journalism both online and offline. My first contribution to journalism studies and deliberative theory therefore lies in the integrated methods I have used to understand participatory journalism practices on social media,

simultaneously researching producers, users and social media texts. This integrated approach was necessary for me to understand participatory journalism practices, because production and consumption of social media text takes place at the same time.

In addition to bringing studies of the practices of journalists and audiences together, my research also contributes to understanding of international broadcasting and media participation between the Global North and Global South. Democratic debate has previously mostly been studied from a national perspective (Bohman 2004), but here I look at transnational debates enabled by the BBC WS. It is important to understand participation as part of the BBC WS's changing approach to soft power over the course of its relationship with audiences in Africa over the past 80 years. At the time my study took place, fostering a global conversation was one of the organisation's key aims, but at other times its goal has been to teach and entertain audiences in Africa, and now as discussed in Chapter 1 and 4, the BBC is fighting an information war in the region. The BBC WS's use of social media as means of participating with audiences must therefore always be viewed in the context of the BBC WS's legacy as a colonial broadcaster and its current public diplomacy mission in the region.

The fact that the BBC WS has a public diplomacy mission does not necessarily have to mean that its journalism cannot be democratic. In order to evaluate the BBC WS's role in international democratic debate, it was necessary to draw on a theoretical framework. Using the theoretical framework of dialogic deliberation, the following key findings directly address participatory journalism and its implications for international democratic debate.

The unequal distribution of technological resources across Africa – and particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, as this is the audience the BBC African services are aiming to reach – means that it is mostly crowd sourced elites in urban centres and the diaspora outside

Africa who make use of the participatory initiatives promoted by the BBC on social media. This inequality in participation has implications for the democratic nature of the BBC WS's transnational social media spaces.

Although they aim to foster a global conversation, journalists still struggle to make use of audiences' voices, which are often expressed differently to how professional journalists talk. This finding means that only the most articulate audience participants can take part in debate programmes or have their posts read out on radio programmes. However, practices are changing, and during my study I saw evidence of the democratisation of language use. Making editing and quality control practices more inclusive has implications for the journalistic profession and for journalism studies.

Journalists who feel that audience contributions are not newsworthy are perhaps the most prominent threat to participation. Audience comments and opinions are considered uninteresting by producers and are therefore excluded. I argue that newsworthiness needs to be revaluated because mutual exploration of stories can make for deliberative yet interesting news reporting, as in the case of the Love African Football Facebook page.

However, my research shows that journalistic gatekeeping is prominent even in participatory journalism. The journalists I interviewed and observed said that the main reason for strict verification and control was to make sure they maintained the public's trust in the BBC. I conclude that gatekeeping on social media played an important function in making sure that undemocratic debate in the form of abusive comments did not form part of online BBC Africa debates. However, gatekeeping also hinders participation if too many professional filters stop the free flow of audience contributions. It can also set the bar too high so that only elites can participate which feeds a circle of inequality and lack of fair representation of all citizens.

To sum up, all three mediated moments observed for this study of participatory journalism at the BBC African services show that technology is not the main factor which fosters participatory journalism. Far more important are the practices of producers and audiences in relation to participatory journalism. As social media continues to grow, becoming the main place where many people interact with news, international democratic debate becomes even more important. Organisations with editorial guidelines designed to prevent undemocratic forms of debate and practitioners trained to encourage dialogue can play an increasingly important role in preventing hate speech, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination online. If participatory journalism follows more dialogic forms of deliberation, as discussed in this thesis, it has the opportunity to allow more voices from Africa to be represented in international debates and for increased diversity in those voices to become a reality.





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# Appendix

## Periods of face-to-face fieldwork at BBC Bush House

The period of intense location based participant observation at BBC Bush House, took place January 2011- May 2013. However, before and after these dates I visited the production teams on a regular basis as well as continuously carrying on with my online ethnography for the remainder of my fieldwork period.

## Interviewee list – in-depth unstructured interviews

These were the individuals I conducted in-depth face to face interviews with during the fieldwork period. However apart from these individuals I had both formal and informal conversation with approximately 20 other production staff at BBC Bush House which also contributed to my insights and conclusions.

Title*	Responsibility	Date(s)	Record
Senior Producer BBC World Service Digital	Social media lead within the digital department	20 <sup>th</sup> February 2011, 3 <sup>rd</sup> March 2011, 21 <sup>st</sup> March 2011, 4 <sup>th</sup> April 2011	Fieldnotes
Head of one of the BBC African language services	Responsible for all BBC outputs in one of the African languages at the BBC WS	21 <sup>st</sup> March 2011	Fieldnotes
Social Media Editor	Social media editor BBC WS	22 <sup>nd</sup> May 2012	Fieldnotes
Social Media Producer	Responsible for all BBC Africa content published on any social media platform in English	3 <sup>rd</sup> October 2011, 23 <sup>rd</sup> October 2011, 26 <sup>th</sup> March 2012, 23 <sup>rd</sup> November 2012, 3 <sup>rd</sup> March 2013	Fieldnotes

<b>Audience Manager</b>	Responsible for audience engagement with audiences in Nigeria	22 <sup>nd</sup> March 2012	Audio recording, transcript
<b>Senior Editor BBC Africa</b>	Head of content BBC Africa in English	21 <sup>st</sup> March 2011, 12 <sup>th</sup> June 2012	Fieldnotes (21 <sup>st</sup> March) Audio recording, transcript (12 <sup>th</sup> June)
<b>Senior Producer</b>	Producer of BBC Africa Debate	2 <sup>nd</sup> May 2012	Audio recording, transcript
<b>Junior Producer</b>	Producer of BBC Africa Debate	31 <sup>st</sup> May 2012	Audio recording, transcript (partial due to poor sound quality)
<b>Senior Sports Editor</b>	Responsible for all sports content in English including for BBC Africa	17 <sup>th</sup> May 2013	Fieldnotes

\*All names and titles have been anonymised to protect the identity of the research participants

#### **Regular meetings attended**

- Weekly BBC Africa Debate planning meeting March 2012-June 2012
- Weekly interactivity meeting attended by interactive editors and social media editors January 2011-June 2011
- BBC Africa editorial meetings March 2012-June 2012

#### **Records kept as part of face to face fieldwork**

- Fieldnotes in notebooks
- Fieldnotes typed into Google docs
- Emails sent to me from BB staff
- Audio recordings
- Transcripts
- Excel spreadsheets with data from Facebook and Sysomos analytics
- Power Point presentations put together with me showing data analysis from Facebook and Sysomos analytics shared with BBC teams